CHAPTER FOUR

Why Is Civil War So Common?

THIS CHAPTER TURNS FROM A MICRO-LEVEL ANALY-sis of what circumstances are conducive to rebellion to a macro-level analysis of what determines the global incidence of civil war. It looks at how the incidence of civil war has changed over time and space and attempts to account for these changes in terms of the underlying causes of civil war identified in chapter 3. Civil war is increasingly concentrated in relatively few conflict-prone countries, many of them in Africa. We use the macro-level analysis to investigate how economic development is changing the overall incidence of civil war. Development has not been reaching those countries most prone to civil war. As a result, if past trends continue, the world will evolve into a two-class system, with the majority virtually conflict free and a minority trapped in a cycle of long internal wars interspersed with brief, unstable periods of peace. The minority of countries caught in the conflict trap will increasingly dominate the global incidence.

Changes in the Global Pattern of Civil War

ACTIVE WARFARE HAS CHANGED ITS CHARACTER OVER THE past 50 years in that international wars have become rare, whereas civil wars have become more common. In 2001 all but one of the world's wars were civil wars. Furthermore, when international wars do occur, they tend to be short: most last less than six months (Bennett and Stam 1996). By contrast, civil wars last a long time, on average about seven years, and their duration has tended to increase.

Figure 4.1 The global incidence of civil warfare, 1950–2001
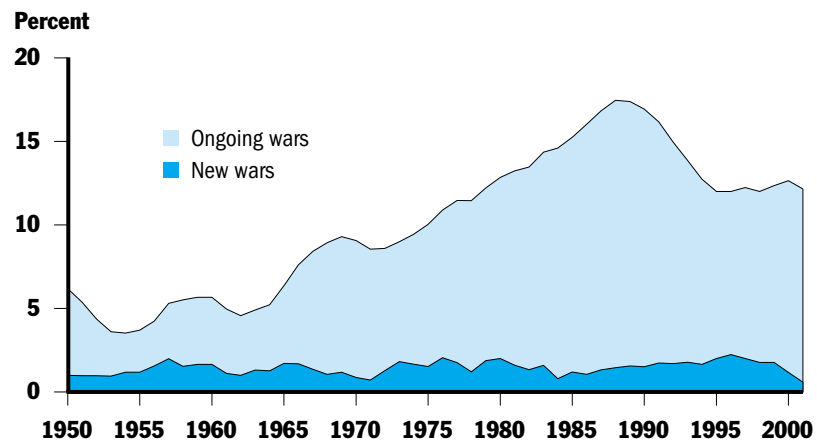
Note: Proportion of countries in civil war by year. Figure shows only conflicts with at least 1,000 battle deaths over the course of the conflicts.
Source: Gleditsch and others (2002).

Figure 4.1 shows the incidence of civil war, that is, the proportion of countries that are at civil war at any one time. Between 1950 and 2000 the overall incidence rose, but this has not been a steady process: the global incidence of civil war peaked around 1990.

The global incidence of civil war at a particular time is determined by the average risk that a rebellion will ignite and by the average duration of a war once it has started. If both the risk of ignition and the duration of war were constant over a long period, the global incidence of conflict would reach a self-sustaining level: the number of wars starting would be balanced by the number of wars ending, so that the stock of active civil wars would stay constant. Throughout 1950–2001 the average annual risk that a rebellion would ignite was around 1.6 percent, while the average annual probability that an ongoing war would end was 12.0 percent, corresponding to a median duration of wars of 5.5 years. If both these probabilities turned out to be persistent, then the global incidence of conflict would eventually settle at around 12 percent, which is roughly the global incidence of conflict in the last eight years.

Fifty years ago the global incidence of civil war was clearly lower than 12 percent. This relatively peaceful period may have ended because of fundamental changes in the underlying factors that cause civil war during the 1950s and 1960s. However, in the 1950s many low-

income countries were still colonies and colonialism suppressed the possibility of civil war. Independence has been bunched in two big waves, the British and French decolonizations of Africa in 1960–62 and the Russian decolonization of the early 1990s. If countries tend to be at peace during their first year of independence, there will be a long phase of adjustment after large numbers of countries have become independent. Thus for much of the period the world has had an unsustainably low incidence of civil war, and at least part of the rising incidence of civil war has been due to a movement toward the self-sustaining level. Note that a self-sustaining level need not be a desirable condition, but simply indicates the global incidence of conflict that the international community will eventually have to cope with unless it can reduce the risk of rebellion and its duration.

The observed rise in the global incidence of civil war from the 1950s to the 1970s need not of itself reflect a deterioration in the factors that cause and prolong conflict, but may simply reflect the existence of many more independent, low-income countries. To illustrate this, figure 4.2 simulates what would have happened to the global incidence of conflict since 1950 as a result of newly independent countries entering the system had all countries faced the actual average risk and duration of conflict during the period. We assume for the time being that all countries have the same risks of conflict ignition and termination and

Figure 4.2 Simulating the effects of the waves of decolonization, 1950–2020

Countries at war worldwide (percent)
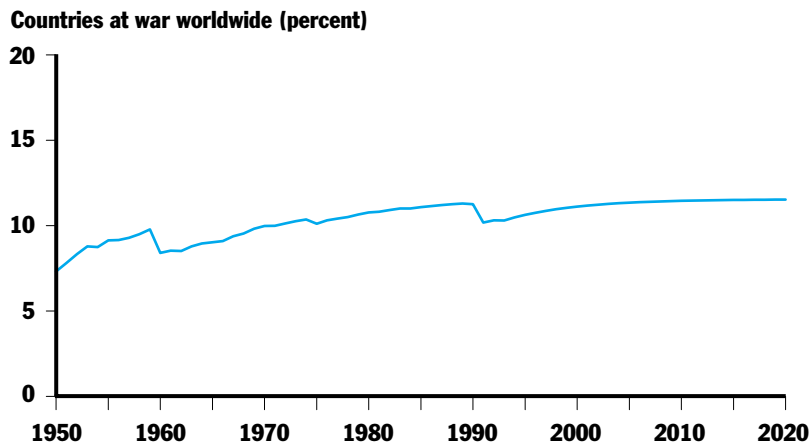
Source: Authors' calculations (see appendix 1).

Figure 4.3   Proportion of civil wars that end each year
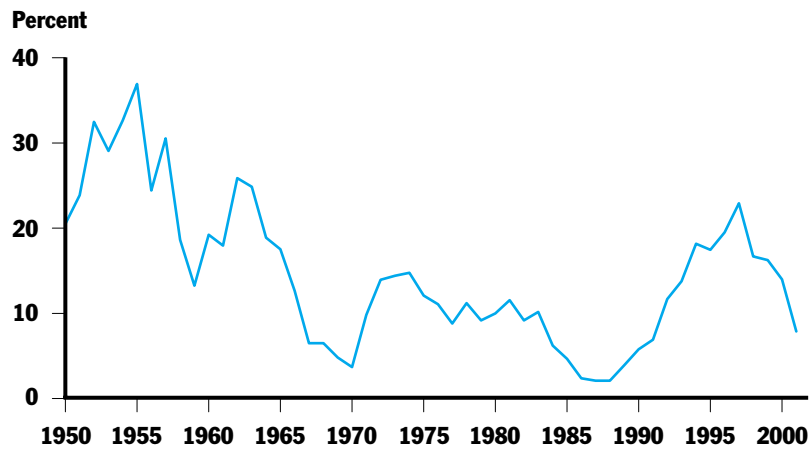
Percent

Source: Gleditsch and others (2002).

that all countries are at peace in their first year of independence.[1] The initial distribution is the actual observed incidence in 1950, around 7.5 percent. In the simulation, waves of decolonization gradually push up the global incidence of conflict to a self-sustaining level of nearly 12 percent by 2020.

The proportion of countries with new wars is shown with a darker shade in figure 4.1. No strong trend in the risk of new wars is apparent. Rather, the figure shows how wars have been steadily accumulating, as the idea of the self-sustaining level implies. However, the rate at which wars end exhibits a disturbing trend. Figure 4.3 shows the rate of war termination during 1950–2001. From 1950 to the late 1980s conflicts became steadily less likely to end. This is why we observe a peak in the incidence of conflicts around 1990, as a surge of peace settlements took place in the first half of the 1990s, but unfortunately this seems to have been a temporary phenomenon.

The most likely explanation for this surge in peace settlements is the end of the Cold War: many conflicts ended as that source of finance dried up, for example, in Mozambique. The end of the Cold War also allowed peacekeeping operations on an unprecedented scale. By contrast, other wars were made sustainable because of the inflow of weapons from the former Soviet republics (see chapter 3). This problem became important later in the 1990s, and may explain the reduction in effec-

Figure 4.4   The global self-sustaining incidence of civil war, by decades
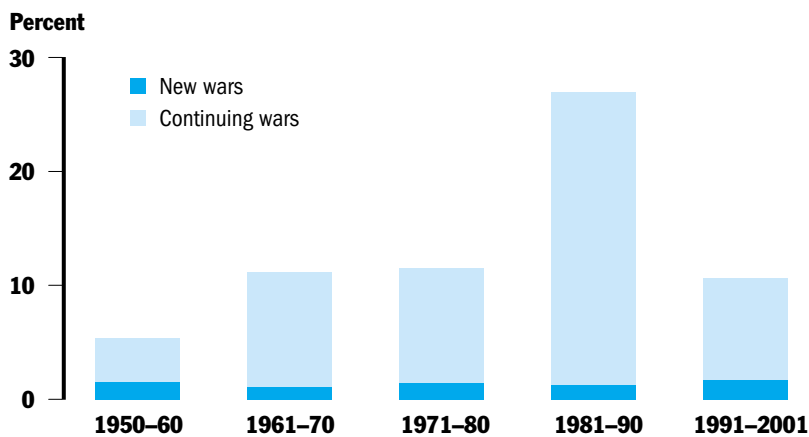
Note: Incidence of conflicts of the five decades decomposed into the share of years with wars that were new and with those that were ongoing.
Source: Based on Gleditsch and others (2002).

tive war terminations during the past five years. Overall, the net positive effect of the end of the Cold War on war duration seems to have been modest and transient.

The declining global risk of rebellion ignition and the lengthening duration of rebellion have together changed the self-sustaining global incidence of civil war. Had the risk and duration prevailing in 1971–80 persisted, the self-sustaining incidence would have been 11.5 percent, whereas had the risk and duration prevailing in 1990–2001 persisted, it would have fallen to 10.6 percent. Figure 4.4 shows the self-sustaining incidence based on the risks and termination rates for each decade. The 1980s stand out. If wars had continued to end at the same rate as in the 1980s, the incidence of war would have reached even higher levels than observed during that period. Fortunately, the improved success in ending conflicts in the 1990s prevented such a rise.

Thus while the actual global incidence of civil war has risen over the past 40 years, the underlying self-sustaining incidence may have fallen slightly. The contradictory forces have been the large increase in the number of independent, low-income countries that find themselves playing the Russian roulette of conflict risk, versus the spread of economic development that has been making the world a safer place.

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Changes in the Incidence of Civil War

THIS DISCUSSION OF HOW THE UNDERLYING INCIDENCE OF civil war might itself have been changing starts by looking at changes in the risk that a rebellion will ignite. The models discussed in chapter 3 attempt a systematic, empirical analysis of the factors that underlie this risk. Here we use Collier and Hoeffler's (2002c) model. The Collier and Hoeffler model obviously omits many important things, but tests for a pure time trend find that in aggregate, these things have not tended to get significantly worse or better over time. Changes in the risk of rebellion are therefore due to changes in the variables included in the model. Whereas the end of the Cold War clearly created a surge of peace settlements, it does not appear to have had a net effect on the risk of new rebellions. Controlling for 17 new low- and middle-income states, the risk of rebellion seems to have neither increased nor decreased. The downfall of the Soviet Union definitely let loose a few civil wars that had previously been repressed,[2] but the end of the Cold War also cut off a source of finance for an unknown number of potential wars.

Hence to understand the global changes over time we need to turn to the explanatory variables included in the model. Many of these variables change only slowly or not at all, such as the ethnic and religious composition of a society and its geographic characteristics. The main factors that can change relatively rapidly are the economic variables. Recall that the three big economic drivers of rebellion are the level, growth, and structure of income.

In addition, newly independent countries have a much higher risk of conflict than other countries. The very fact that they are new countries with weak institutions and often with a legacy of decolonization wars makes them five times more war prone in their first year of independence than comparable but older countries (Hegre and others 2001). If these new countries are able to sustain peace, this history of stability itself gradually makes them safer. Moreover, most new countries are low-income, developing countries, with average income approximately half that of older countries. In sum, these two factors mean that newly independent countries face a risk that is 10 times higher than other countries.

Globally, if we compare the 1960s with the 1990s these characteristics were very different. The countries that were independent in the 1960s typically had considerably higher per capita income by the 1990s, and this tended to reduce their risk of rebellion. Also working favorably

Figure 4.5   Factors changing the global risk of conflict

Change in risk of civil war (log)
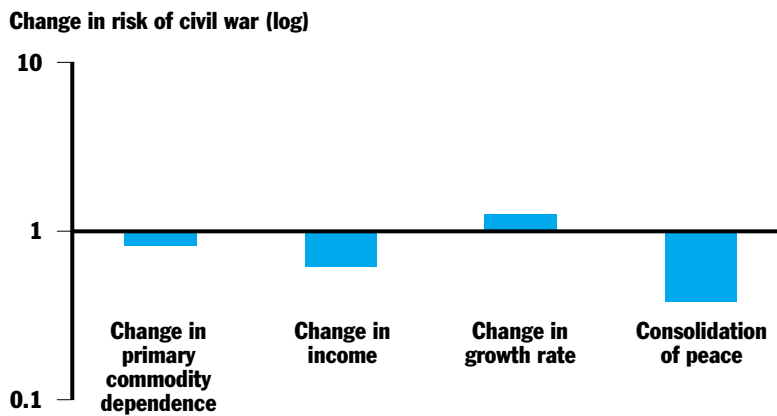
Note: Contributions to the change in risk of civil war from 1965 to 1995.
Source: Based on Collier and Hoeffler (2002c).

was a decline in the average extent of dependence on primary com-
modities. Offsetting this, growth rates were lower and new low-income
countries had become independent. The Collier and Hoeffler model
can be used to compare the typical risk of rebellion facing countries in
1965 and in 1995. It suggests that the typical risk declined from 9.2
percent to 6.8 percent in 1995. The main reason for this improvement
was global economic development and the consolidation of new states.

Figure 4.5 shows the overall reduction in risk and its constituent
components. The growth in average per capita income and reduction
in primary commodity dependence reduced the global average risk of
conflict by something like 30 percent from 1965 to the mid-1990s.
This reduction was offset by the lower growth rates relative to those of
the late 1960s. The increase in the average duration of postindepen-
dence peace is the factor that has made the strongest impact. This has
lead to a 50 percent decrease in risk.

What explains the trend in the duration of war? To look at this we
use a model designed to study the duration of civil war (Collier, Hoef-
fler, and Söderbom 2003). As with the risk of rebellion, the duration of
conflict may have changed over the past 40 years either because of
changes in the variables included in the model or because of changes in
factors that are important but are omitted. Whereas no significant time
trend in the risk of conflict ignition was apparent, its duration shows a
substantial time trend: after controlling for the explanatory variables,

Figure 4.6   The changing rates of conflict termination

Change in rate of termination (log)
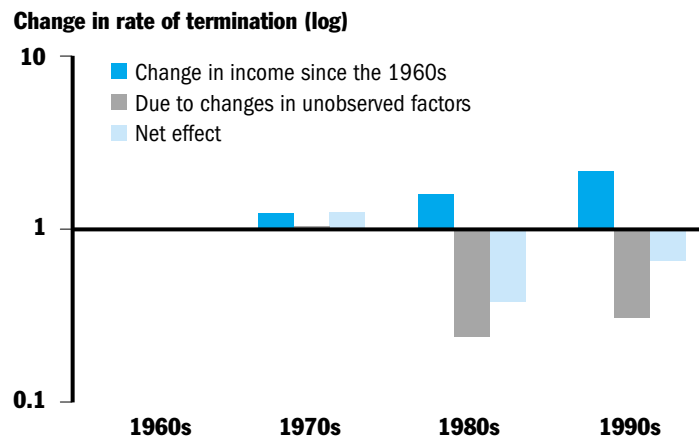
Source: Collier, Hoeffler, and Söderbom (2003).

conflicts were harder to end in the 1980s than in earlier periods. They may also have been more persistent in the 1990s. By definition, the model cannot tell us why this has happened: it is due to factors not included in the model.

In addition, some of the variables included in the model have changed. The higher per capita income is, the shorter the civil war. Recall that this might be expected for various reasons, namely, civil war is costlier at higher income levels, and thus the incentive to reach a settlement is stronger. Whatever the explanation, the strong rise in global per capita incomes has tended to shorten the duration of wars.

The overall change in the termination rate of conflict is thus the net effect of the unexplained lengthening of conflict, decade by decade, and the shortening of conflict resulting from global economic growth. Figure 4.6 shows the net effect, decade by decade. Overall, the unexplained effect has more than offset the favorable effect of global growth, therefore the duration of conflict has increased.

Unpacking the Global Incidence of Civil War

S O FAR WE HAVE FOCUSED ON GLOBAL AVERAGES. AVERAGES often conceal wide dispersions, and sometimes they also conceal important structural differences. This is the case with conflict.

Divergent Development Trends

For the past 20 years global growth has been raising incomes in much of the developing world and reducing the incidence of poverty. Much of the world's population now lives in middle-income countries, defined as those with per capita annual income above US$745. The structure of developing countries' exports has also changed dramatically. Whereas in 1980 primary commodities still accounted for three-quarters of exports, they now account for only 20 percent. Some low-income countries, including the largest, have succeeded in implementing and sustaining policy reforms conducive to rapid growth and integration into global markets. While currently they are still low-income countries, they are on track to joining China in becoming middle-income countries. Recall from chapter 3 that fast growth is not just a route to the eventual low risk that goes along with higher income levels, but also contributes directly to risk reduction. We therefore aggregate those low-income countries that have sustained reasonably good economic policies with the middle-income countries and term the combined group "successful developers." Specifically, we include all those low-income countries that over the 1990s averaged CPIA scores of 3.5 or better.[3] Some of the successful developers are still at high risk of conflict, but as a group they are already much safer than other developing countries and are on course for continuing reductions in risk.

Many developing countries have not, however, participated in these favorable trends. They have either been unable to implement reform or their reforms have not been sustained and they remain stuck in undiversified primary commodity exports. We refer to this group as the "marginalized" low-income countries. The growth rates of per capita income in the two groups of countries were dramatically different in the 1990s, negative at –1.0 percent for the marginalized countries and positive at 2.0 percent for the successful developers. The average level of income in the marginalized countries was less than a third that of the successful developers when measured on a purchasing power parity basis.

Thus in aggregate, the marginalized countries are the one group that has all three of the economic characteristics that appear to increase proneness to conflict: low income, economic decline, and dependence on primary commodities. The following section compares the risks and incidence of a civil war for a typical marginalized country with that for the typical successful developer. Figure 4.7 shows the predicted risk for

Figure 4.7   Divergent risks: marginalized countries relative to successful developers
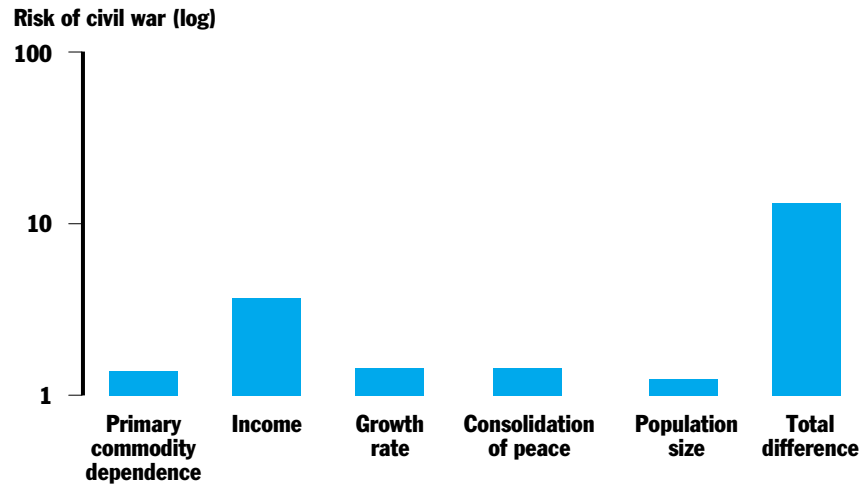

Source: Based on Collier and Hoeffler (2002c).

the typical marginalized country relative to the typical successful developer and the contribution of some important risk factors. The predicted risk is more than 10 times higher for the marginalized country. Low income has the largest impact, accounting for half the difference.

To date global development has largely missed the marginalized countries; thus, while global growth is indeed reducing the global incidence of conflict, it is doing so dramatically unevenly and cannot be relied on to secure a peaceful world. If the trends of the past 20 years continue, the successful developers will evolve into low-risk societies while the marginalized countries will face increasing risks as their per capita incomes decline. Figure 4.8 shows how the predicted risk of civil war ignition evolves for the marginalized countries and successful developers relative to the high income countries if recent growth patterns persist. Global growth is part of the process of reducing the incidence of civil war, but unless it reaches the currently marginalized countries it will progressively become less effective as a force for peace. As the successful developers evolve into a group with lower risks of rebellion, the increment to peace achieved by further growth and diversification in income becomes smaller and smaller. Global growth is not sweeping the world into peace at an accelerating rate. If present trends continue its contribution to peace will fizzle out well before global peace has been achieved.

Figure 4.8   Development of risk of civil war for the marginalized and successful developers, 2000–2020

Risk of civil war (log)
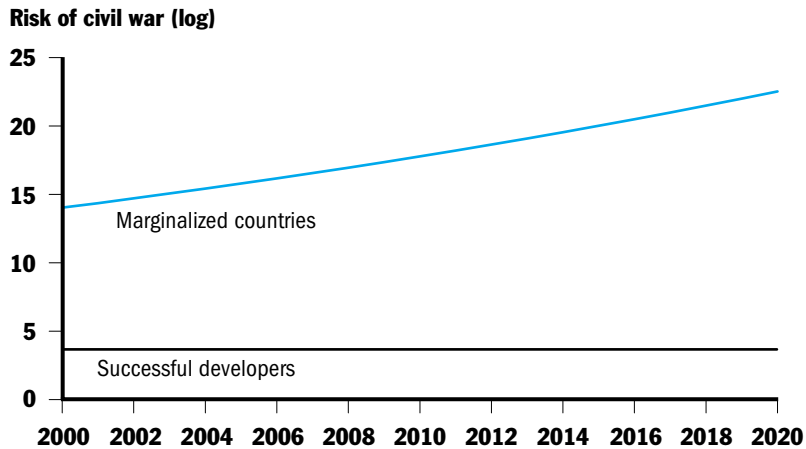
Note: The contribution from growth to income per capita to the odds of war onset relative to high-income countries, with growth projections of 1.5 percent (high income), –1.0 percent (marginalized), and 2.0 percent (successful developers).
Source: Calculated from Collier and Hoeffler (2002c).

The radically different risks the successful developers and marginalized countries face imply different incidences of civil war for the two groups in the long term. As long as they remain stagnant, the marginalized countries will remain at the incidence experienced during 1990–2001, whereas the successful developers will slowly but surely reduce their incidence from their current somewhat lower level. Changes in the global incidence depend both on these two divergent trends and on the relative size of the two groups. The successful developer group is largest in terms of both number of countries and population—71 countries with around 4 billion people—versus 52 marginalized countries with around 1.1 billion people. Nevertheless, the global incidence of civil war will increasingly come to be dominated by wars in the group of poor, declining, primary-commodity exporting countries as the incidence of war in the successful developer group decreases.

Implications of the Conflict Trap

Chapter 3 introduced the concept of the conflict trap. Through various routes, once a conflict has started a society faces a greatly increased risk

of further wars. Conflicts are hard to stop, and what happens during conflict increases both the risk and duration of subsequent conflict. Countries that have had a war have a two to four times higher risk of a subsequent war, even when controlling for the factors we identified earlier. Boxes 4.1 and 4.2 describe two recurrent conflicts.

Figure 4.9 indicates how the risk of war ignition is altered after a civil war compared with before a war. The risk depends on how long the country has been independent and at peace. In the first month of postindependence peace the risk of war is more than four times as high as after a decade of peace. After the first decade of consolidation, the risk does not change much as time goes by; however, if a civil war breaks out the gain from this consolidation is lost. After the war, the risk of war re-igniting is two to four times higher than the risk facing new states. This is the conflict trap: a country that first falls into the trap may have a risk of new war that is 10 times higher just after that war has ended than before the war started. If the country succeeds in maintaining postconflict peace for 10 years or so, the risk is considerably reduced, but remains at a higher level than before the conflict. This legacy of war seems to take a long time—a generation or two—before withering away (Hegre and others 2001).

Box 4.1   Recurrent conflicts example 1: Afghanistan

THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN STARTED IN 1978 WHEN members of the Marxist-Leninist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan captured the state; assassinated political, ethnic, and religious elites; and incited uprisings (Asia Watch 1991). After the Soviet invasion of December 1979 and the assassination of Afghan president Hafizullah Amin, the war continued with mujahideen fighting against the Soviet-installed Afghan government of Mohammad Najibullah. In 1992 the mujahideen captured power and the state changed hands, but peace negotiations among Afghanistan's many resistance factions excluded key parties. One such group was Gulbuddin Hikmatyar's Hizb-i Islami, which rejected the resulting agreement and began a series of rocket attacks on Kabul that continued into 1995 (Hiltermann 2002).

From 1992 until 1996 the war was waged by the Pashtun-dominated Taliban seeking to overthrow Burhanuddin Rabbani and his Tajik-dominated Jam'iyat-i-Islam party. After a Taliban victory in 1996 a new war started in which the Tajiks, Uzbeks, and others became the insurgents against the new "government" (Gurr, Marshall, and Khosla 2001). In 1997 the Taliban proclaimed the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, which was recognized by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The Taliban never controlled all the territory of Afghanistan, and about 5 to 10 percent of that territory was controlled by the alliance known as the United Front, formed in 1996 by non-Pashtun groups opposed to the Taliban and led by Rabbani's former defense minister, Ahmad Shah Massoud.

Box 4.2   Recurrent conflicts example 2: Angola

A PATTERN OF FAILED PEACE AGREEMENTS IN Angola has checkered a history of civil war that has been ongoing since the country's independence in 1975. The war against UNITA over control of the central government from 1975 until 1994 caused approximately 345,000 deaths and ended in a stalemate that led to the Lusaka Accord and the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force. Failure to implement the agreement led to a renewal of war in late 1997. The U.S. State Department noted more than 100 ceasefire violations in a three-month period in 1996. Despite that instability, the period 1996–97 was one in which UNITA officials were becoming increasingly integrated into the government, and the annual death toll during this time was probably "only" in the low hundreds. Fighting resumed in March 1998 despite an agreement reached on January 9, 1998, for resolution of the remaining issues under the Lusaka Accord. UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi refused to move to the capital and join the government. UNITA forces quickly retook more than 300 areas previously returned to the government, but by the end of 1999 the government, with the support of Namibian government forces, had overrun UNITA's former headquarters (Parker, Heindel, and Branch 2000). Thereafter, UNITA's military position continued to deteriorate because of a double squeeze. The government used the opportunity of high oil prices to increase military spending. At the same time the Fowler Report of the UN exposed the routes by which UNITA had been financed and supplied, as a result of which it was closed off. In February 2002 Savimbi was cornered and killed and UNITA accepted a peace settlement. The Angolan government was able to negotiate from strength. More than 10,000 people were killed in the new round of fighting, and according to the United Nations Children's Fund, nearly 75,000 people died of starvation in 1999 and at least 1.5 million people were displaced as of January 2000 because of the war (Parker, Heindel, and Branch 2000).

This increase in risk is before we account for the changes in the observable risk factors caused by the war itself. In particular, the impact of the civil war on the economy is extremely damaging (see chapter 1). Growth of GDP per capita is reduced by around 2.2 percentage points per year during war. Moreover, the effects of the war linger on after the conflict, so that the country's economic performance is hampered for several years after the conflict has ended. Only after extremely long conflicts, for example, in Mozambique, where disruption is so complete that the mere fact that large numbers of people return to work shows up as a significant improvement, will a peace agreement mean an immediate improvement in growth performance. Hence the typical conflict reduces income by some 10 to 15 percent. Such losses in income are also often associated with an increase in primary commodity dependence of roughly two percentage points (Collier and Hoeffler 2002b). These two changes imply an increase in the risk of war onset of an additional 5 percent.

Figure 4.9   The conflict trap: risk of civil war relative to a country with no recent war

Risk of civil war (log)
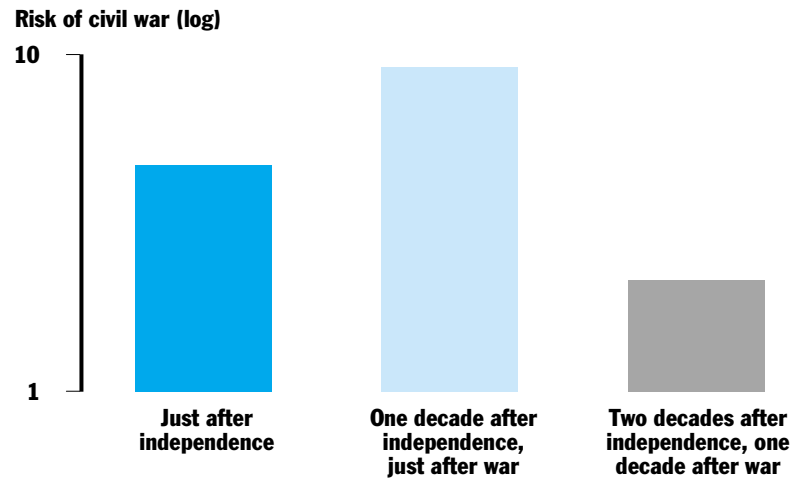
*Source:* Hegre and others (2001); Collier and Hoeffler (2002c).

Some risks also arise from neighbors in conflict, so to some extent the conflict trap operates at the level of a neighborhood, not just of a single country. Quantitative studies of civil war onset find no evidence that civil wars are more frequent in countries bordering on conflict countries, controlling for the explanatory variables (see, for example, Hegre and others 2001); however, civil wars spill over indirectly through their effects on the explanatory variables such as income (Murdoch and Sandler 2002). Reduced income in neighboring countries indirectly increases their risk of conflict, and as most countries have several neighbors, in aggregate, such small increases in risk can have significant effects.

The conflict trap is a tendency, not an iron law. Middle-income countries have a lower probability of falling into it. A previous conflict seems to increase the risk for middle-income countries by the same factor as for low-income countries, but as they have a lower general risk, they have better chances of maintaining peace beyond the first post-conflict decade. Figure 4.10 summarizes the predicted risks of war ignition and re-ignition for the typical country in each group.

Figure 4.11 decomposes the effect of the conflict trap into the economic factors that change as a consequence of the conflict and other unobserved factors that change during the war. Such other factors are the accumulation of weapons and military organizations and less tan-

Figure 4.10   The conflict trap by type of country

Annual probability of outbreak of war (percent)
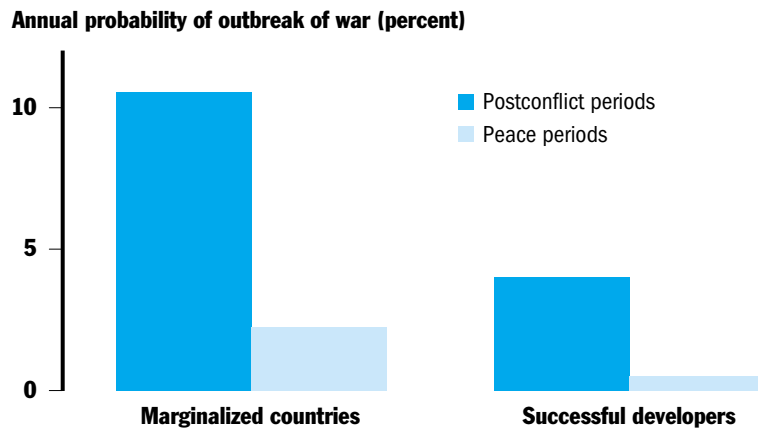
Source: Based on a revised version of Collier and Hoeffler (2002c).

Figure 4.11   Risk components for marginalized countries in the conflict trap, relative to the same countries preconflict

Risk of civil war (log)
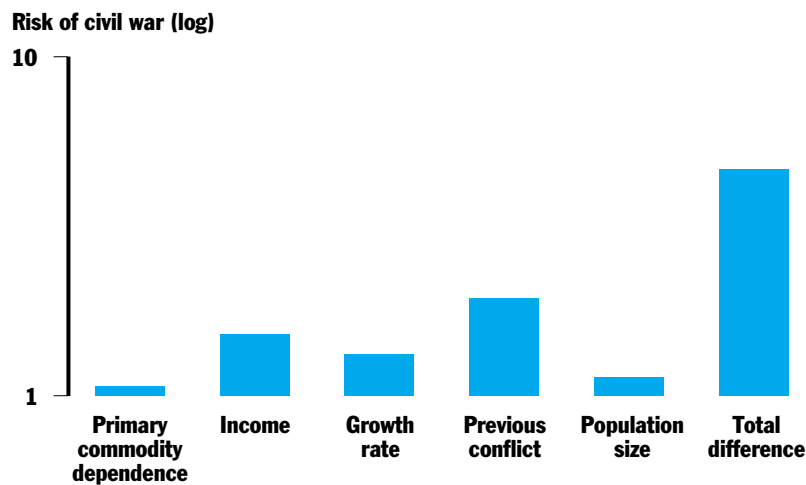
Source: Based on a revised version of Collier and Hoeffler (2002c).

gible effects of war, such as the breakdown of institutions and social polarization. The figure compares the risk of the typical marginalized country that has not had a war for 10 years and the typical postconflict marginalized country. The postconflict country has a risk of conflict that is five times greater. Around half of that increased risk is due to

negative changes in primary commodity dependence and reduced income and growth. The other half of the increased risk is unexplained and will in part be due to the selection problem: conflict countries already had unobserved characteristics that increase the risk of conflict.

The conflict trap has implications for the global incidence of conflict. The countries most prone to the trap are the marginalized low-income countries. Although poor, peaceful, stagnant economies look as if they are stuck in an equilibrium, they are, in effect, playing Russian roulette. A low-income, stagnant country that starts its independence at peace does not have a very long expected duration of that peace, although some countries, even though economically stagnant, have to date preserved peace, whether through prudent policies or good fortune, for example, Malawi, Tanzania, and Zambia. However, even long periods of peace are no guarantee of safety. Côte d'Ivoire and Nepal are recent instances of moderately democratic low-income countries with long histories of peace collapsing into civil war.

The marginalized stagnant but peaceful countries are thus living dangerously. Not only are they prone to civil war, more important, once a war has started they also face a permanently changed risk of conflict, that is, they are stuck in the conflict trap. The poor but peaceful category of countries, although currently numerous, is thus not likely to be so numerous in a global self-sustaining level. We would expect these countries either to develop, joining the successful developers, or at some stage succumb to civil war, with many then becoming trapped in conflict. In the long run poor but peaceful is not an option. The world is therefore evolving into a state in which most countries are permanently conflict free while a minority are trapped in a cycle of lengthy war, uneasy peace, and reversion to lengthy war.

This leads to a different view of the self-sustaining incidence of conflict, with radically different risks for different groups. The high-income countries have a negligible risk of civil war. A second group of countries, a majority, will be in a virtuous circle of peace, with income rising strongly and diversifying out of dependence on primary commodities. These countries will face a low and declining risk of conflict. The few civil wars that occur in this group may be long, but they will tend not to trap countries into a cycle of conflict. A third smaller group of countries will be stuck in a conflict trap. Although they may periodically reach peace, the legacy of the conflict is such that peace is not sustained. Occasionally countries will switch between these groups. Once

in a while a peaceful and prosperous country might collapse into civil war and find itself subsequently stuck in a conflict trap. Similarly, once in a while a country that has been mired in repeat conflict will climb out of it. A fourth group, the poor but peaceful, will hover in between development and the conflict trap.

Figure 4.12 illustrates the trap.[4] We grouped 156 countries with adequate data coverage into the four groups of countries. Here we regard countries as in a postconflict state during the first decade after a war has ended, and as at peace if they have not had a war in the past 10 years. We estimated the predicted risks of war for a typical country in each group. The risk is a function of levels of income, primary commodity dependence, growth, and the other characteristics found to be pertinent in chapter 3. The risk changes over time after independence or war. The model was estimated for the 1960–99 period.

For the typical low-income country, the predicted probability of going to war from a state of peace is 2 percent per year, whereas the

Figure 4.12   The conflict trap in 2000: annual flows into and out of conflict
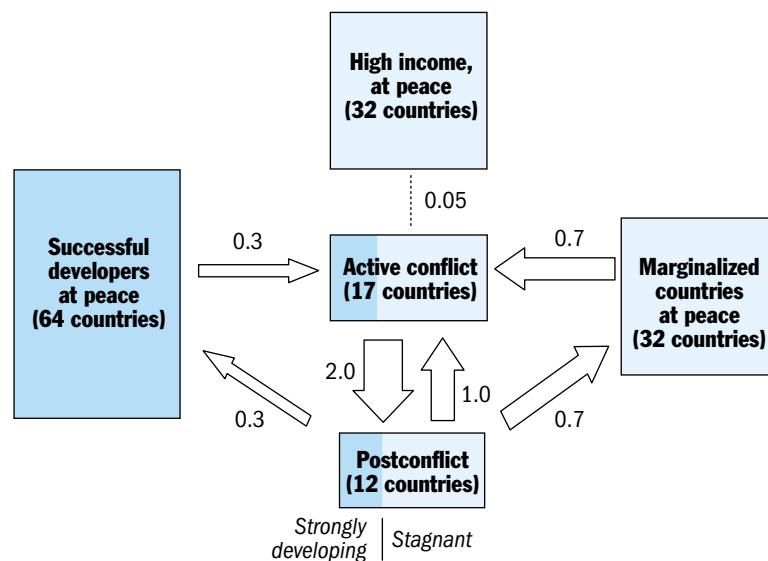
Note: Numbers next to the arrows indicate the number of countries per year that move between the different states of conflict in the self-sustaining state. Numbers in boxes indicate the self-sustaining number of countries in each conflict state. See appendix 1 for fuller coverage.
Source: Based on a revised version of Collier and Hoeffler (2002c).

probability of war from a postconflict situation is about 10 percent per year. We adopt a median duration of wars of about five years. Just as we computed a self-sustaining incidence of war from the probabilities of starting and ending wars, we can compute the self-sustaining distribution of peace, war, and the postconflict state for the typical low-income country: it is predicted to be at war 24 percent of the time, in a postconflict state 15 percent of the time, and at peace 61 percent of the time. The corresponding predicted distribution for a typical middle-income country is 5 percent, 5 percent, and 90 percent, respectively.

Figure 4.12 simulates how this self-sustaining distribution will be reflected in global numbers of conflict onsets and fall-backs. Seventeen countries are predicted to be involved in a civil war, of which 15 are ongoing wars. Half of the conflict onsets will be from the group of postconflict countries. In the simulation, there is one re-entry into war every year. Each year 0.7 low-income countries will go from a state of established peace to war, whereas only 0.3 peaceful middle-income countries will do so. As this pattern is self-sustaining, two wars end every year and one country leaves the postconflict period in peace.

The simulation is only an approximation, for example, it abstracts from differences within each group. However, we would expect that continued divergence in growth rates between the successful developers and the marginalized countries would gradually alter the structure of global risks. Figure 4.13 shows how given this scenario of stagnation for some and growth for others the global incidence of civil war would evolve by 2020 and by 2050.

If these projections are broadly correct they carry a disturbing message. A further 50 years of development along past trends will have little impact on the global incidence of civil war: the number of civil wars declines from around 17 to around 13. This disappointing outcome is because the outbreak of war becomes increasingly concentrated in the marginalized and postconflict countries, with their combined share of global conflict rising from 82 percent in 2000 to 94 percent by 2050.

The Changing Regional Pattern

The incidence of civil war has differed dramatically across regions. In part, this is because the countries in a region tend to have many features in common and some of these features affect the risk of conflict. In

Figure 4.13a   The conflict trap in 2020: annual flows into and out of conflict

Strongly developing | *Stagnant*
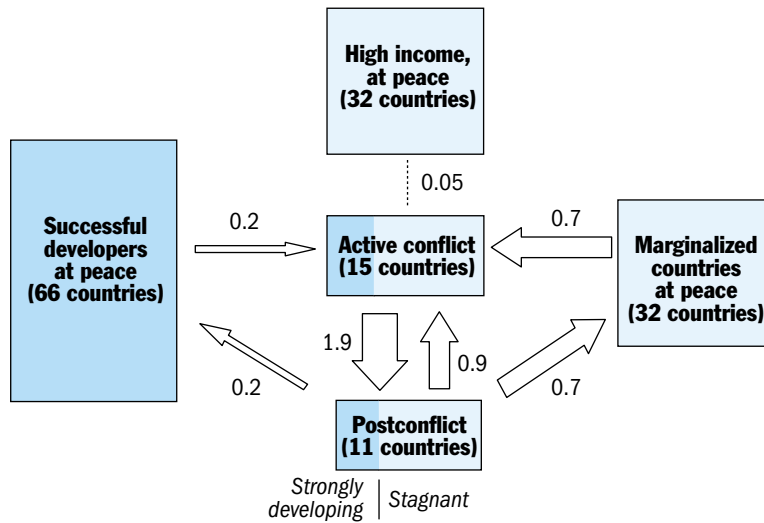
Figure 4.13b   The conflict trap in 2050: annual flows into and out of conflict

Strongly developing | *Stagnant*
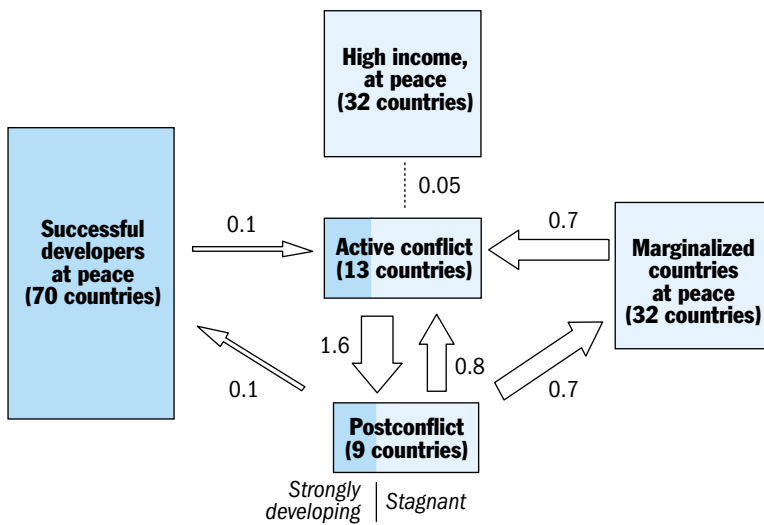
Note: The simulation assumes the same growth rates as in figure 4.8. Numbers next to the arrows indicate the number of countries per year that move between the different states of conflict in the self-sustaining state. Numbers in boxes indicate the self-sustaining number of countries in each conflict state. See appendix 1 for fuller coverage.
Source: Based on a revised version of Collier and Hoeffler (2002c).

Figure 4.14   The incidence of civil war in South and East Asia and in Oceania, 1950–2001

Percent
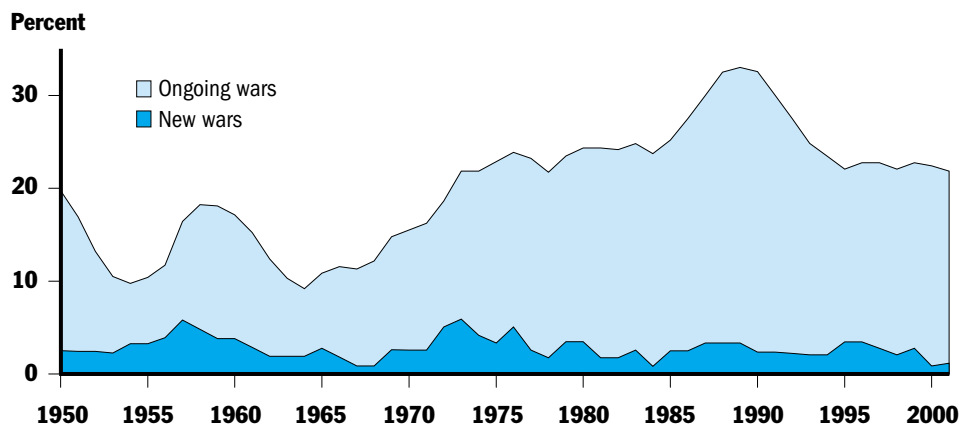
Note: Proportion of countries in civil war by year.
Source: Gleditsch and others (2002).

addition, as noted in chapter 2, civil wars generate spillover effects for neighbors. Hence if by chance a region has a relatively large number of conflicts, this will itself increase the risks facing the countries in the region that have remained at peace.

Two regions stand out over the entire 1950–2001 period. Developing Asia (figure 4.14) has had a persistently high incidence of civil war, while countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have had a persistently negligible incidence. We use the previous models of conflict initiation and duration to test whether these regional effects are accounted for entirely by the factors included in the model or whether there are region-specific omitted factors. Neither model finds significant omitted effects for these regions. The radically different incidences of civil war are accounted for predominantly by the radically different levels of economic development in the countries.

Other regions have been distinctive because of either bouts or trends. Latin America had a severe bout of conflict in the 1980s, but has showed remarkably positive development since the end of the Cold War (figure 4.15). No new wars have begun since 1985, and most of the wars that began before have ended. In 2001 only the conflict in Colombia lingered on. Whether the peace in Guatemala and Peru will survive its first difficult decade remains to be seen, but according to the analy-

Figure 4.15   The incidence of civil war in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1950–2001
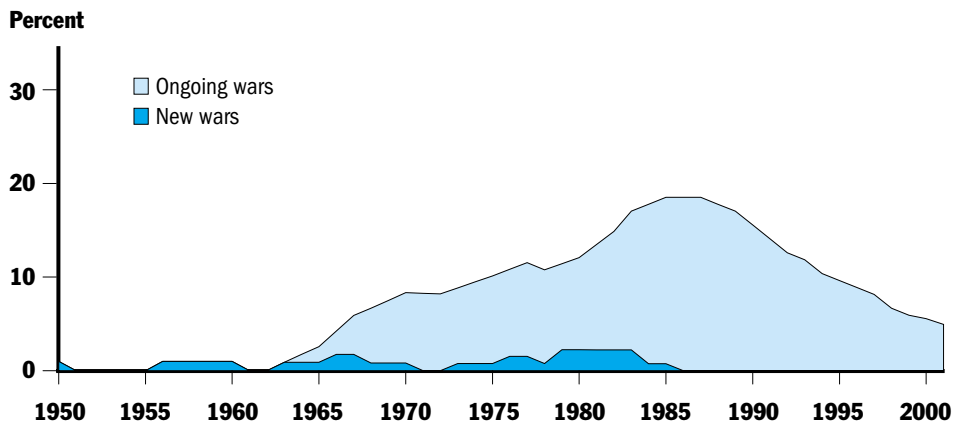
Percent

Note: Proportion of countries in civil war by year.
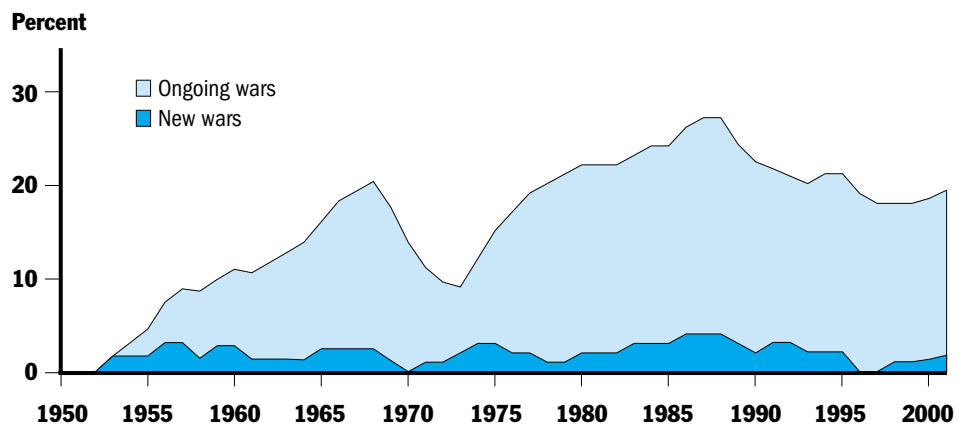*Source:* Gleditsch and others (2002).

Figure 4.16   The incidence of civil war in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 1950–2001

Percent
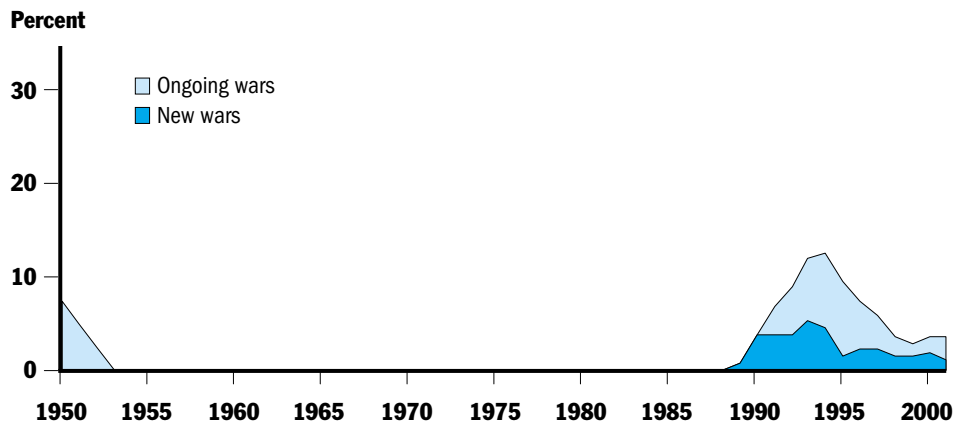
Note: Proportion of countries in civil war by year.
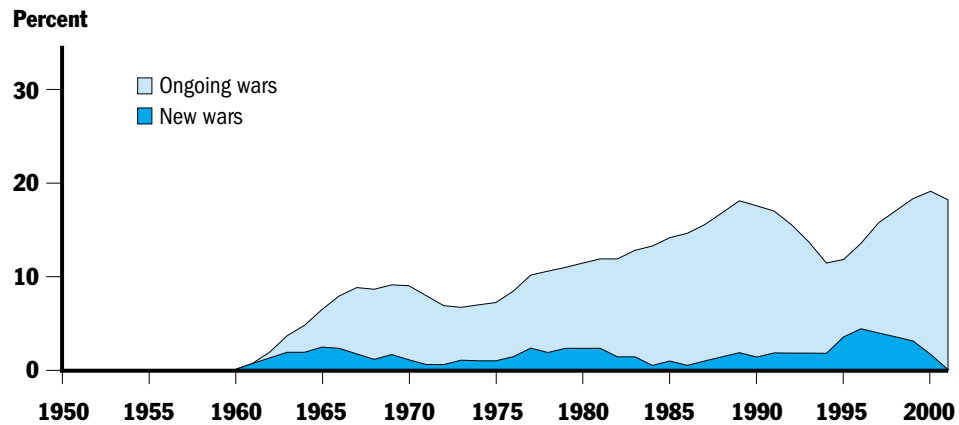*Source:* Gleditsch and others (2002).

sis shown earlier, the prospects for these middle-income countries are good. The former Soviet bloc had a severe bout of conflict in the 1990s, but most of these conflicts were short (figure 4.16). The Middle East and North Africa region has had a stable and high incidence of civil war since the late 1960s (figure 4.17).

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Figure 4.17   The incidence of civil war in the Middle East and North Africa, 1950–2001

Percent

Note: Proportion of countries in civil war by year.
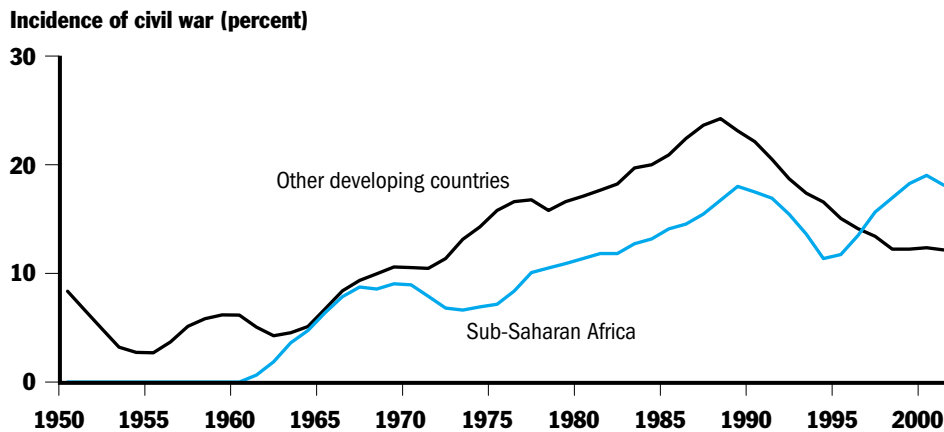*Source:* Gleditsch and others (2002).

Figure 4.18   The incidence of civil war in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1950–2001

Percent

Note: Proportion of countries in civil war by year.
Source: Gleditsch and others (2002).

Perhaps the most disturbing trend has been the rise in the incidence of violent conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa (figure 4.18). Until the 1980s Africa had a below-average incidence, whereas now it has an incidence at par with Asia's and the Middle East's and much higher than Latin America's. It is the only region that did not see a decrease in incidence

Figure 4.19   The incidence of civil war in Africa and other developing countries, 1950–2001

Incidence of civil war (percent)

Source: Gleditsch and others (2002).

over the 1990s. Figure 4.19 shows the incidence of war in Sub-Saharan Africa compared with that in other developing countries.

The media perception of the concentration of conflict in Africa is that it is related to deep-rooted ethnic antagonisms. Africa is indeed more ethnically and religiously fractionalized than other regions of the world. It encompasses an estimated 2,000 ethnic groups, so the typical country is highly diverse. The media explanation for conflict in Africa may be right, but before one accepts it uncritically, attempting a statistically grounded analysis is worthwhile.

As with global incidence, changes in the incidence of civil war in Africa have three components: a movement to the self-sustaining level, a change in the level caused by changes in the risk of rebellion, and a change in the level caused by changes in the duration of conflict. Part of the explanation for Africa's rising incidence of conflict is indeed likely to be a gradual adjustment toward its self-sustaining level. Africa was decolonized more recently than other regions, and so its countries have been experiencing the Russian roulette of civil war risk and accumulating conflicts for a shorter period.

We first investigate whether Africa's risk of rebellion ignition is distinctive and whether it has changed over time. Africa could be distinctive either because the variables that explain the initiation of rebellion in the model are distinctive for Africa or because factors left out of the

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model are distinctive for Africa. The latter possibility can be investigated by including a dummy variable for Africa. When this is included—both for the whole of the region and for the francophone part separately—it is insignificant; thus the distinctive behavior of the variables included within the model account for Africa's distinctive experience.

If we compare economic variables for 1970 with those for 1995, Africa appears to have changed relatively little. Per capita income had barely risen over the quarter century, and by the early 1990s growth rates had actually turned negative, whereas in the late 1960s they had been quite high. Dependence on primary commodity exports had increased slightly over the period. In combination, the Collier and Hoeffler model estimates that the risk of the initiation of rebellion in Africa increased from around 8 percent for the five-year period 1970–74 to around 12.6 percent for 1995–99. By contrast, other developing regions had, on average, experienced a substantial increase in per capita income, and even though growth rates were lower in the early 1990s than in the late 1960s, they remained positive. Furthermore, these other developing regions had sharply reduced their dependence on primary commodity exports from levels above those of Africa in 1970 to levels well below those of Africa by 1995. In combination the model estimates that these changes substantially reduced the risk that a rebellion would be initiated, from nearly 15 percent in 1970–74, a level far higher than that of Africa, to around 5 percent by 1995–99.

If the model is broadly correct it implies that the distinctively rising incidence of civil war in Africa was at least partly due to the contribution of Africa's distinctively poor economic performance to its risk of rebellion ignition. Other regions had sufficiently good economic performance to radically drive down the rate at which rebellions were initiated.

As concerns the duration of conflict, the Collier, Hoeffler, and Söderbom model does not find any distinctive Africa effect. To the extent that African conflicts last a long time it is because of factors included within the model. Here again, Africa's distinctive economic performance matters. Recall that the lower per capita income is, the longer conflicts tend to last. The divergence between Africa and other developing regions in per capita income has tended to shorten non-African conflicts relative to African conflicts. Africa has thus had no favorable offsetting effect to the unexplained global trend for conflicts to lengthen.

Africa has experienced quite different trends from other developing regions, both in the risk of conflict ignition and in its expected dura-

tion. Both of these divergences are due to its worse economic performance. As these are the two components determining the self-sustaining incidence of civil war, the implication is that the incidence rose in Africa whereas it declined substantially elsewhere.

How does this account compare with the popular media explanation of African conflict in terms of deep-rooted ethnic hatreds? Recall that the statistical analysis reported in chapter 3 agrees that ethnic and religious composition affect both the risk of conflict and its duration. Ethnic dominance is a substantial risk factor, although ethnic and religious diversity is otherwise a safety factor. Compared with other developing regions, the model considers Africa's social composition to be conducive to a low risk of conflict ignition. Its high level of diversity implies that fewer African countries (40 percent) are characterized by ethnic dominance compared with other developing regions (54 percent); however, once a conflict starts, Africa's ethnic composition is likely to lead to longer conflicts. Africa's index of ethno-linguistic fractionalization is higher than in other regions, and for the typical country this implies that conflict would be longer. The lower risk of conflict ignition and longer conflicts on the incidence of conflict offset each other, so that the effect of social composition on the incidence of conflict is ambiguous. In essence, however, the models suggest that far from Africa's conflict problem being deep-rooted in its social structure, it is a consequence of the disastrous deviation of African economic performance from that of other developing countries that set it apart during the 1970s and has proved persistent. Of course, Africa's distinctive social composition may have contributed to its poor economic performance, but this is a different issue.

Conclusion: Poverty and the Conflict Trap

INDIVIDUAL CIVIL WARS HAVE THEIR OWN IDIOSYNCRATIC causes, such as the appearance of a charismatic rebel leader coincident with government abuses of power; however, long-term changes in the global incidence of civil war are unlikely to be determined by any overall pattern in such idiosyncratic events. The behavior of two groups of countries will increasingly come to dominate the global prevalence of civil war: the marginalized countries and those in the conflict trap.

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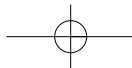
The contribution of the marginalized countries to the global incidence of conflict will depend on the size of the group and its economic performance. Thus stimulating development in the slow-growing, low-income countries is one of the two critical interventions to reduce the global incidence of conflict. The other critical intervention is to weaken the conflict trap, thereby increasing the chances of sustained peace in postconflict situations. These are not the only intervention points for enhancing global peace, but they will increasingly become the most important ones. Part III focuses on these.

Notes

1. Later in the chapter we show that newly independent countries have a particularly high risk of war. This is not accounted for in figure 4.2. A simulation including this in the specification would have had a quicker convergence to the self-sustaining incidence.

2. See Mearsheimer (1990) for an extremely pessimistic prediction just after the Cold War ended.

3. These were Armenia, Bhutan, Ghana, India, Indonesia, and Uganda.

4. The methods used to produce this figure are described in detail in appendix 1.