

Lecture 1

What can the subject of economics contribute to the analysis of conflict?

1. Economic factors might cause, or at least contribute to, conflict.
2. Conflict can influence economic development.

In short, there may be a complex relationship between conflict and development with causality running in both directions. Many people believe that such a relationship does exist. For example, the US just (late September, 2004) diverted \$3.5 billion of money originally intended for Iraq reconstruction into security and job creation. There are several ideas underlying this shift: first, that without proper security reconstruction attempts are pointless; second, unemployed people are more likely than employed people to join insurgencies; third, that belief in a rosy economic future, engendered by visible economic progress, can undermine insurgency. There is a lot of discussion of these sorts of issues in the context of Colombia (my favourite context) in <http://www.cfr.org/pdf/Andes2020.pdf>.

To the extent that economic factors are intertwined with conflict it is natural for economists to study conflict. Strangely, with a few notable exceptions, economists have not risen to the challenge. Yet, there is some interesting material out there that I can draw on for this course.

3. Economics methodology is useful for the study of conflict. I would stress two pillars of the economist's approach.
 - a. *Analysis of rational decision making.* Some people who lead others into war or who make important decisions during wars are probably crazy. One often hears about senseless wars, or pointless killing. Nevertheless, there is much to be gained by viewing conflict participants as rational actors. Economists are very well prepared to perform this type of analysis.
 - b. *The use of numbers and statistics.* I believe there is a big payoff to applying numbers and statistics to conflict. Again, economics training is very valuable here.

Of course, economists are far from having a monopoly on the analysis of rationality and the use of statistics, but they are very good at these things.

Let's take a look now at Bethany Lacina and Gleditsch, N. P., "Monitoring Trends in Global Combat: A New Dataset of Battle-deaths,"

<http://www.prio.no/cscw/cross/battledeaths>.

This is a remarkably big and careful effort. They, rather audaciously, put together figures on all wars in the world between 1946 and 2002! You should try to think a bit about what that means.

Of course, it is impossible for two researchers to put together histories of all these wars. Instead, they focus on one particular piece of information: what they call "battle deaths."

Battle deaths are defined as soldiers and civilians killed in combat, i.e., in two-sided fights between the warring parties. Civilian killings in such events are often referred to as "collateral damage" or "crossfire killings".

They present two alternatives to their choice of the battle death concept: combatant deaths and war deaths. Exploring the alternatives will help us develop a grip on the battle death concept and improve our general understanding of war.

Here are a series of observations:

1. Some soldiers die out of combat. Some might contract a disease and die. Some might die in a helicopter crash while delivering some supplies somewhere. L & G do not include these types of things which are mainly relevant for understanding the difference between war deaths and the other two categories.
2. In a war normal institutions, such as the police and judiciary, often stop functioning well. A common consequence of this is that crime rates, including homicides, soar. L & G do not include excess deaths that might be indirectly attributable to conflict. This is mainly relevant for understanding the difference between war deaths and the other two categories.
3. Wars play a role in spreading diseases. For example, water supplies might become contaminated due to war-induced destruction. Or soldiers might rape people, spreading HIV and other diseases. L & G do not include these. This is mainly relevant for understanding the difference between war deaths and the other two categories.
4. L & G also do not include deaths in what they refer to as "one-sided" events. This is quite a big exclusion in many conflicts. This leave out massacring of defenceless civilians, because when there is no effective resistance there is only one side to an event. Such massacres can happen on a large scale, for example in the case of genocides. They also exclude killings of unarmed protesters by government forces and the execution of prisoners of war. Somewhat surprisingly, they consider terrorist attacks as two-sided and include them on the theory that terrorists risk detection by the enemy and hence these should be considered as combat actions. The only problem I have with this is that many other one-sided actions, such as massacres, also carry at least some chance of interception and so once the door is opened for terrorism it becomes unclear where to close it. For example, are mine explosions one-side or

two-side events? I suspect that L & G have included them as two-sided but I am not sure. This is mainly relevant for understanding the difference between war deaths and the other two categories.

It is important to stress here that I am not offering up points 1-4 as criticisms. They are to help understand what L & G are measuring. The most important thing for them is to measure something meaningful. Their concept is intended essentially for military evaluation. It seems reasonable to think that from a military point of view battlefield performance is the most illuminating indicator and this is what L & G endeavour to measure. The second most important thing for L & G is to be consistent, i.e., they should apply the same measuring stick to each conflict to the extent possible. This is where L & G have made really strenuous efforts, surpassing a number of other similar efforts.

It is also important to stress that L & G have not left out various types of deaths because they do not care about them. Rather, they have done so for analytical purposes.

If you go onto <http://personal.rhul.ac.uk/pkte/126/Pages/ccar.htm> you can find your way to some of the other big datasets that various research teams have created. Some of these other efforts are also very impressive.) Restrepo, J. M. Spagat and J Vargas, 2004, "The Severity of the Colombian Conflict: Cross-Country Datasets vs. New Micro Data," unpublished manuscript, <http://personal.rhul.ac.uk/uhte/014/> looks at a bunch of these efforts through, admittedly, a very narrow lens; the Colombian conflict. You will hear much (too much?) about our Colombia dataset in this course. But the main point here is that it is very detailed. It would be impossible to build up that level of detail on all the wars that L & G cover. In the above paper we check how these big datasets that cover lots of conflicts perform on one particular conflict, Colombia, for which we have very good information. The answer is that they do all right in some respects. For example, some datasets have broad categories that they classify conflicts into depending on their intensity and these datasets generally get it right according to their own criteria for Colombia. But we find in general that these datasets tend to underestimate the intensity of the conflict and lose any sense of the real movement over time in its intensity.

This critique does not apply to G & L because they adopted our numbers. But still I would suggest an attitude of respectful caution in dealing with these large-scale efforts.

What do L & G find?

1. Overall trend in battle deaths is down, 1946-2002.
2. There are big spikes for wars in Vietnam, Korea, China, Iran-Iraq and Afghanistan.
3. The big wars were cold-war-driven.

4. If you get rid of the big wars then there is not a clear trend down, i.e., the big wars have been getting smaller and this fact drives down battle deaths over the whole period.
5. Interstate and internationalized civil conflict have declined but have been strongly replaced by civil conflict.
6. East and South East Asian conflicts have declined but have been replaced by conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa and Central and South Asia.
7. Now the main conflict scenario is civil war in weak/failed post-colonial states.