Armed Conflict, Multilateralism and the UN SDGs: Outlook

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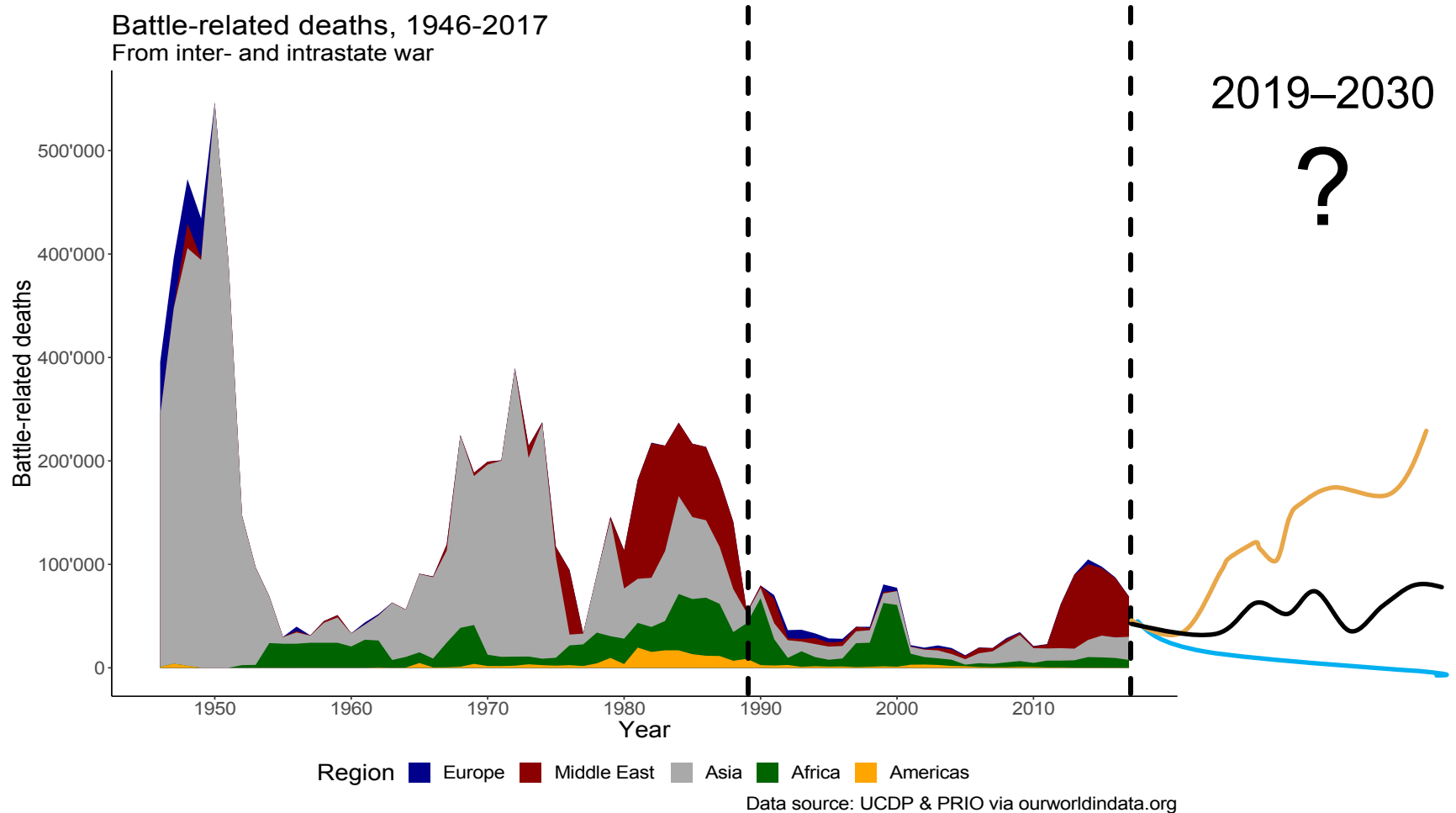International Conflict Research | ETH Zurich | www.icr.ethz.ch

UN: Gathering Storms and Silver Linings

New York, February 20-21, 2019

UN Sustainable Development Goals: Selected Targets

- Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere (16.1)

- By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status (10.2)

- Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries (13.1)

- Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies (10.7)

Trends in battle deaths since WWII

Battle-related deaths, 1946-2017
From inter- and intrastate war

2019–2030
?

Region: Europe, Middle East, Asia, Africa, Americas

Data source: UCDP & PRIO via ourworldindata.org

Conflict, Multilateralism & UN SDGs: Three Tentative Scenarios

(1)   **Reinvigorated Liberal Multilateralism**

(2)   **Muddling Through**

(3)   **A new Illiberal International**

Reinvigorated liberal multilateralism

- Domestic politics and institutions
  - Democracy, rule of law, civil rights & liberties
  - Inclusive political identities, "civic nationalism"
  - Progressive role models and diffusion of liberalism
- International order
  - Strengthening of multilateral institutions & policies
  - Cooperative rather than conflictual interactions
- Implications for political violence
  - Less discrimination, political exclusion and repression
  - Non-violent avenues for political participation & change
  - Less violence throughout
- Implications for sustainable development
  - Coordinated action to address challenges (e.g. climate, conflict, migration)
  - Sustainable development as top priority in domestic and international politics
- Positive feedback loops

Muddling through

- Domestic politics and institutions
  - Liberal reforms in some countries, backsliding in others
  - Competition between nativist and internationalist movements & ideologies
- International order
  - Multilateral institutions remain important but increasingly contested
  - Competition between regional and ideological camps
- Implications for political violence
  - Intrastate conflict persists
  - New onsets as well as successful endings
- Implications for sustainable development
  - Incremental progress but important misses
  - Coalitions of the willing
- Probably not enough

A new illiberal International

- Domestic politics and institutions
  - Populist victories & democratic backsliding
  - Nativism & extreme nationalism
  - Authoritarian role models and diffusion of illiberalism
- International order
  - Weakening of multilateral institutions (UN, NATO, EU…)
  - Zero-sum rather than mutual gains-based interactions
- Implications for political violence
  - More discrimination, political exclusion and repression
  - More violent opposition
  - Potential resurgence of interstate war (e.g. irredentist campaigns)
- Implications for sustainable development
  - No coordinated action to address challenges (e.g. climate, conflict, migration)
  - Governments pursue other (spending) priorities
- Negative feedback loops