

## Geopolitics

---

*Competition, conflicts, and wars in the future  
international system*

Wilhelm Agrell

Lund University

Aug., 2009

Wilhelm Agrell (2009). *Geopolitics. Competition, conflicts, and wars in the future international system*. External drivers affecting Swedish forests and forestry. Future Forests Working Report

**Acknowledgement:** The research was funded through Future Forests, a multi-disciplinary research program supported by Mistra (the Foundation for Strategic Environmental Research), the Swedish Forestry Industry, the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Umeå University, and the Forestry Research Institute of Sweden.

**Note:** As this is a working report it should not be cited unless contact has been taken with the authors who are fully responsible for the content of the publication.

Contact Wilhelm Agrell: [wilhelm.agrell@fpi.lu.se](mailto:wilhelm.agrell@fpi.lu.se)

This working report is one in a series of ten reports which focus on external drivers that have a potential of affecting the Swedish social-ecological forest systems in the future. The drivers were chosen after discussions in Future Forests' Core Team of researchers and in Future Forests' Panel of Practitioners. The reports are essential inputs to the research program's scenario analysis of possible futures for the Swedish social-ecological forest systems. Other reports on *External drivers affecting Swedish forests and forestry* are:

- Gustaf Egnell, Ola Rosvall & Hjalmar Laudon (2009). *Energy as a driver of change*. External drivers affecting Swedish forests and forestry. Future Forests Working Report
- David Ellison & Carina Keskitalo (2009). *Climate politics and forestry. On the multi-level governance of Swedish forests*. External drivers of change affecting Swedish forests and forestry. Future Forests Working Report
- David Ellison, Maria Pettersson & Carina Keskitalo (2009). *Forest governance. International, EU and National-Level Frameworks*. External drivers affecting Swedish forests and forestry. Future Forests Working Report
- Lena Gustafsson (2009). *Environmental crises as drivers of the state and use of Swedish forests*. External drivers affecting Swedish forests and forestry. Future Forests Working Report
- Ragnar Jonsson (2009). *Forest Products Markets*. External drivers affecting Swedish forests and forestry. Future Forests Working Report
- Gunnar Malmberg (2009). *Demographic drivers and future forests*. External drivers affecting Swedish forests and forestry. Future Forests Working Report
- Annika Nordlund (2009). *Values, attitudes, and norms. Drivers in the Future Forests context*. External drivers affecting Swedish forests and forestry. Future Forests Working Report
- Christer Nordlund & Ola Rosvall (2009). *Scientific and technological developments as drivers*. External drivers affecting Swedish forests and forestry. Future Forests Working Report
- Markko Rummukainen (2009). *Climate change. External drivers affecting Swedish forests and forestry*. Future Forests Working Report.
- Camilla Sandström & Anna Lindkvist (2009). *Competing land use associated with Sweden's forests*. External drivers affecting Swedish forests and forestry. Future Forests Working Report.

All reports can be downloaded as PDFs at Future Forests webpage

<http://www.mistra.org/program/futureforests/hem/publikationer/workingreports.4.71c20537124c890652d80004498.html>

*Future Forests analyzes conflicting demands on forests systems  
to enable sustainable strategies under uncertainty and risk*

# Content

---

1. Introduction .....	3
2. International conflicts and the Swedish forests and forest sector.....	5
3. Method .....	9
4. Looking back.....	11
5. Looking forward.....	15
6. Conclusions .....	18
References .....	19
Appendix 1. Effects of geopolitics on other drivers.....	20
Appendix 2. Impact of other drivers on geopolitics.....	21

# 1. Introduction

---

The main purpose of this paper is to define the possible impact of external political developments regarding security and conflicts on Future Forest scenarios. The paper does not try to cover domestic politics, the development of the world economy, or international relations as such. The main theme is possible developments in the political sphere of a character and magnitude that would affect the scenarios. I will therefore not attempt to make a comprehensive forecast, only to identify a range of developments and, to the very limited extent possible, assess their probability. For this reason, the paper will focus on the direct and indirect impact of possible future conflicts affecting the international system partly or as a whole. The field of future conflicts is broad and extremely complex but only to a limited degree relevant for the Future Forest scenario process. In the paper I will try to narrow down the field and identify those aspects appearing to be most relevant. These aspects will then be discussed in terms of patterns and trends, and finally their possible impact on scenarios, directly or indirectly through other drivers, will be briefly discussed.

All external political developments cannot be analyzed. The driver would be far too broad and general and subsequently of limited use; of course the world politics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will influence virtually everything, not only political and economic developments but also values and perceptions. Instead I will focus on the external political driver on the element of risk. This is based on the assumption that the other main drivers, if *not* affected by interference from conflicts or disruptions in the international system, would proceed and interact “undisturbed”. With this I mean that there is a mass of possible developments on the international scene affecting economy, markets, regulations etc. that also includes some elements of conflict within the systems, as for instance is the case with controversies over EU-regulations, the issue of free trade and contested jurisdiction. This does in most cases not threaten the stability and functions of the system. However, during a process of conflict escalation and transformation, a development can turn into a process or chain of events affecting the system as such. Many cases of internal conflicts illustrate this process, emanating from opposition and dissent within an existing system, escalating into civil disobedience, decreasing legitimacy of state institutions and the spread of group violence or secession movements, finally leading to the collapse of the state and civil society in revolution or civil war, possibly also causing external intervention and the internationalization of the conflict.

All such system-affecting conflicts, very broadly speaking defined as conflict that cannot be managed by the existing institutions and norms or through their orderly transformation (new legislation, new political organisations etc.) are not relevant here. The overwhelming majority of these conflicts are limited and local, and even if their consequences on the local scene might be severe and prolonged, the impact on the international level is limited or insignificant. However, some conflicts spread through a process of horizontal escalation or through side-effects of wider significance, for instance affecting energy, routes of transportation or crucial natural resources. Some conflicts also receive a symbolic value, while others do not – the “forgotten wars”.

What this driver specifically focuses on is therefore the global and regional developments that might cause conflicts affecting the international system, major actors, relevant individual states or regions in a fundamental way. All types of conflicts or changes in the international system are not included. It is the conflicts that cannot be contained or managed within the systems, the system-affecting or system-breaking conflicts, that stand out as a potential driver for processes leading to break-down of inter-state or intra-state order and the redistribution of power, resources or the control of territory and physical destruction with human, ecological and material consequences.

Correspondingly, the ability of international, non-governmental and state institutions to handle conflicts is relevant. Without such mechanisms, limited conflicts can escalate and transform and cause severe disruption. The logic behind the world organisations as the League of Nations and the

United Nations has been to maintain international peace and security and prevent the spread of conflicts. Therefore, if we are dealing with possible consequences of conflicts in the international system, we have to take into account both the *risk* of conflicts and the *ability* of the system as a whole to prevent, handle or contain these conflicts. So, there could theoretically be an increase in armed conflicts but a more stable international order to contain them. But there could also be an erosion or collapse in the international order, transforming a few and initially local conflicts to serious threats against world peace (as illustrated in the process leading to the outbreak of the first World War).

## 2. International conflicts and the Swedish forests and forest sector

---

War, whether waged between states, by non-state actors or as internal conflicts, can not only cause widespread human suffering and destroy the material infrastructure of societies, it can also affect agriculture, fishing and forestry by destroying natural resources, making areas inaccessible or blocking routes of transportation. Armed conflicts therefore have the potential to virtually nullify all other drivers, in a similar way as a major natural disaster would.

Swedish forests have not been directly affected by armed conflicts during the modern era, mainly as a consequence of the long peace enjoyed by the country, caused mainly by geopolitical and geo-strategic factors. The situation is very different if we compare with Finland and the Baltic states. However, the two world wars and their aftermath did have a profound indirect effect on the Swedish forest sector, as was the case with other export-oriented sectors of the Swedish economy. Export from the forest sector (timber-products and pulp) decreased sharply at the end of the First World War and in the post-war recession. A second drop appeared during the Great Depression but the most profound drop came during and after the Second World War, with export shrinking to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century level in 1944. Pre-war levels had not been recovered until 1950 (timber; Figure 1) and mid-1950s (pulp; Figure 2), a considerably more far-reaching impact than the Great Depression had.<sup>1</sup> These figures illustrates the combined impact of the direct and indirect effects of a major armed conflict: the disruption of international trade, reallocation of national resources and long-term effects due to post-war recession, collapse of societal order and the physical destruction in importing countries. It should be observed that other major fluctuations in export correlates with the cycles in the international economy, balance of trade etc and not with armed conflicts.

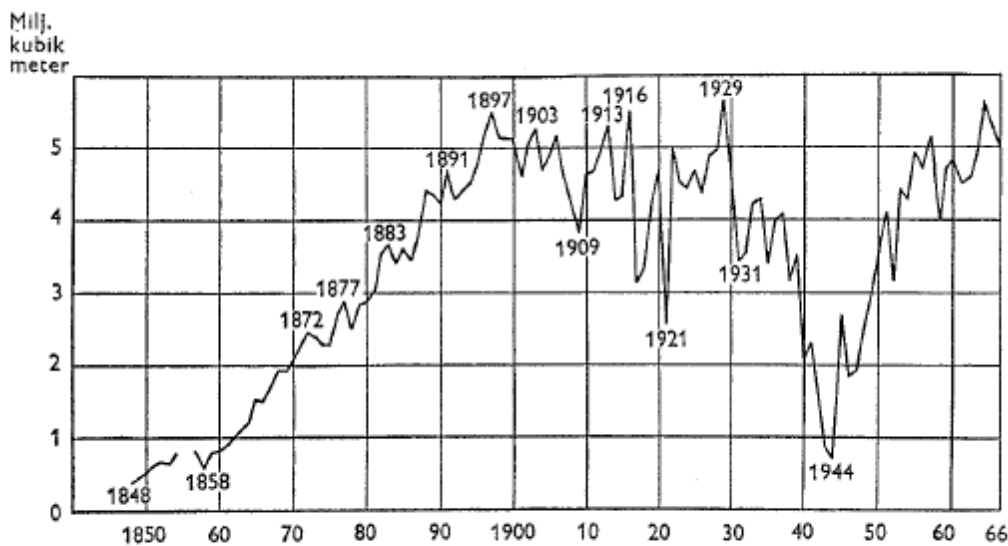


Figure 1. Swedish export of timber products 1848 – 1966 (Carlsson-Rosén 1970 p. 374)

<sup>1</sup> Carlsson-Rosén (1970) diagram 8 and 9, p. 374 ff. Diagrams based on *Statistisk årsbok* and *Sveriges skogar under 100 år*.

The probability of the Scandinavian area being directly affected by future armed conflict must be regarded as remote, even in a very long perspective, due to the combination of low internal tension, stable institutions, recognized borders and the absence of a history of external conflict since the 1940s (see further section “Looking forward”). The low probability must however be regarded in relation to the possible consequences. From a risk management perspective, armed conflicts in a Northern European context is an example of the combination low probability/high impact, where even the most unlikely contingencies must be regarded from a long term security perspective. However, in the Future Forest context, an armed conflict of an extent directly affecting the forest resources is such a massive driver that it becomes irrelevant, given the over-all purpose of the project, which is not to identify possible future risks as such. Like a large meteorite, it is something that *might* happen, but it would disrupt the society to such an extent that there is little use including it in the scenario work.

Direct impact of conflicts on the Swedish forest resources might theoretically appear in a number of ways (further discussed in section “Looking forward”):

- Direct physical impact (least likely).
- Disruption of trade and markets as experienced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (possible in the long perspective).
- Destabilization or disintegration of international regimes (possibly the most likely contingency given the length of the period – how likely is unbroken stability?).

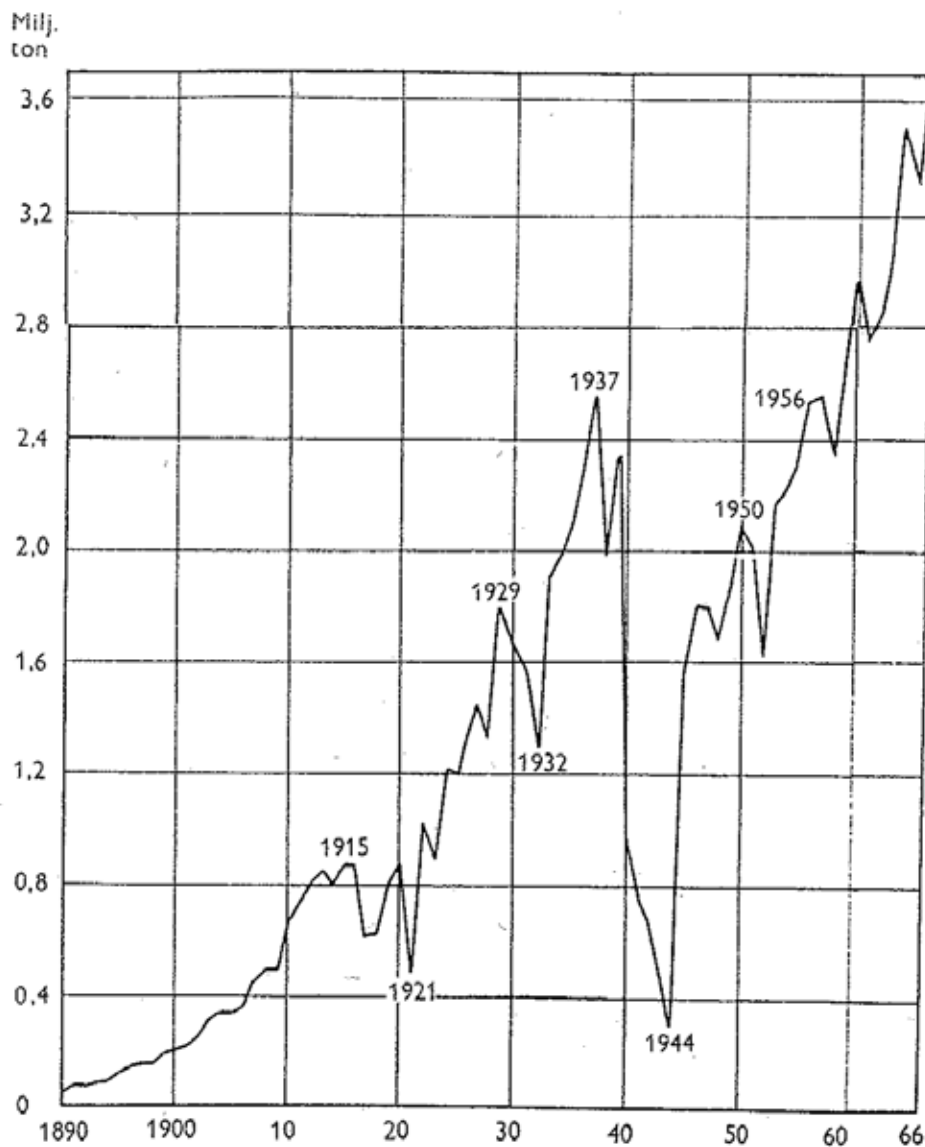


Figure 2. Swedish export of pulp 1890 – 1966 (Carlsson-Rosén 1970 p. 376)

The availability of forest resources might also to some extent be affected by a pre-conflict escalation, for instance an increased strategic competition resulting in the construction of military facilities and establishment of security zones as was the case with parts of the Swedish coastal areas since the 1940s and various buffer zones and border zones along the Iron Curtain during the Cold War. New technologies can result in earlier unknown demands. (see for instance the impact of the U.S. Thule Base on Greenland from the 1940s).<sup>2</sup> While such a process of militarization or securitization is not visible today, it cannot be ruled out in the 50-100 years perspective, especially

<sup>2</sup> See Duke (1989) chapter 3. and *Grønland under den kolde krig.* (1997).



in the context of possible conflicts regarding the Arctic region (see “Looking forward”) and a continuing momentum in the development of new arms technologies.

The main possible impact of international conflicts is however most likely indirect, through side-effects on international cooperation and institutions and economic development. This means that the driver in itself is not producing these consequences, they appear mediated through other drivers (see Appendix 1 and 2). This is a complicating factor as the impact therefore can be difficult to identify, separate and assess.

### 3. Method

---

With a 50-100 years perspective, conventional methods to assess international developments and possible conflicts cannot be used. Such methods would unavoidably lead to a focus on factors dominated by the concepts of the present, which has been the common fallacy in forecasts in the security sphere ever since the method was generally introduced in the 1960s. While it is often possible to reasonably assess short-term trends and the level of stability or instability, forecasts usually fail in identifying sudden events, unexpected chain reactions and major systemic changes (like the end of the Cold War). Other methods have to be employed, more focusing on long-term patterns and static or slowly changing factors, as for instance resource scarcity and competition. The exact pattern of future conflicts can never be anticipated let alone predicted, not only in the distant future, but sometimes also as the conflicts are actually evolving. The *dynamics* of conflicts makes them in a logical sense unpredictable. The philosopher Carl von Clausewitz writes about the friction of war, the unforeseeable factor that disrupts every plan of battle. Friction not only creates confusion on the battlefield but also in every attempt to identify the pattern and consequences of future armed conflicts.

There is considerable research on and literature about the types, frequency, level and causes of international and internal conflicts. In comparing a large number of cases it is possible to identify certain recurring elements and patterns. In the individual cases, “causes” are often a too general concept to be useful as a scientific explanations of the often complex and transforming process leading to and continuing during the conflict. The initial causes can become less important or even disappear once the conflict is under way, so the answer often depends on when in a conflict process the question is asked, or to be more precise, what you try to explain. The bottom line is an ever-present risk of over-simplification. However, on an aggregated level, covering a longer period and a large number of cases, an analysis of patterns and correlations regarding initial causes becomes more relevant.

The definition of war remains contested. Clausewitz famous functional definition regards war as a “true political instrument” and an “extension of politics with other means”. The quantitative research focus on the actors and the level of violence, defining a major armed conflict as one resulting in over 1.000 battle related deaths in one calendar year. The purpose is to distinguish between serious conflicts and minor skirmishes without political or humanitarian significance. The quantitative approach can however give strange results when an ongoing conflict results und just under the 1.000 limit for in one or several successive years.<sup>3</sup>

There is still no universal theory on causes of conflicts and wars. The most extensive empirical project, the *Correlates of War*, has been operating since the early 1960s, and has assembled data on armed conflicts from early 19<sup>th</sup> century to present.<sup>4</sup> Together with additional data-sets especially covering the post-Cold War period, it is possible to identify a number of over-all trends in the frequency and types of armed conflict. The most important ones are the decrease in interstate wars (underlined by the rapid growth of the number of state actors) and the increase in internal conflicts and conflicts involving non-state actors (as is the case with the main adversaries in the U.S. led War on Terrorism since 2001). These findings will be further discussed below, focusing on the three issues:

---

<sup>3</sup> For the definition currently used by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, see *SIPRI Yearbook* 2009 p. 77-78. Once a conflict has reached the 1.000 threshold, it will reappear in the annual statistics in any year that there 25 or more recorded battle related deaths within the same parties.

<sup>4</sup> The major findings of the project is summarized in Geller and Singer (2000). For further literature on causes of war, see for instance Howard (1983) and Luard (1986)

1. Long-term trends in the pattern of serious armed conflicts.
2. Structural causes of conflicts
3. The risk of major interstate wars or confrontations.

## 4. Looking back

---

Over the last one hundred years there has been a shift from a Eurocentric, colonial world order, through a bipolar relatively stable system to multi-polarity and globalization. The world order is constantly changing, so there is not very much point in analyzing future conflicts in the context of the world situation as we perceive it at present. However, we can by looking back identify a number of significant incremental changes:

- The focus on self-determination, starting in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and continuing in the 20<sup>th</sup> century decolonization and the subsequent break-up of states along regions and fractions.
- The efforts of the international system to regulate and limit the use of war, but the failure to effectively outlaw war and protect victims of war.
- The conduct of warfare as a function of the scientific and technological developments, going from industrial mass-production (First World War) to mass destruction (Second World War) and overkill (Cold War) to the automated battlefield (Vietnam, Iraq etc.). Future major wars will hardly be a repetition of 20<sup>th</sup> century wars, but a function of future technology, political conditions and economical and ecological constraints.<sup>5</sup>
- The growth of interdependence as a process with assumed conflict-preventing effects, especially in the context of the European integration since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and the rise of regional security communities where the use of armed violence is ruled out as counter-productive and a taboo, coupled to the notions that democracies do not fight war against each other (the “Liberal peace” theory).<sup>6</sup>
- The continuing and transforming competition for renewable and non-renewable resources.

As indicated by this list, there has been double process, both limiting the use of armed force and creating conflicts which eventually could develop into the use of force. This is also visible in the pattern of armed conflicts. The number of armed conflicts has remained relatively stable in the 10-year period 1999-2008, with a total of 34 conflicts during the period with between 14 and 21 ongoing annually.<sup>7</sup> Of these 34 conflicts, only 3 were interstate wars, the rest being either internal conflicts within states or internationalized internal conflicts. For the fifth year running, there was no interstate war recorded in 2008 (the latest being the 2003 Iraq-war).<sup>8</sup> The methodological problem mentioned above becomes clearly visible here; the August 2008 Georgian-Russian war does not appear in the SIPRI statistics, since it, although the high level of armed violence, was too brief to result in the stipulated 1.000 battle-related casualties.

The long-term trend towards internal conflicts, both in proportion and in absolute numbers, is more clearly visible in the compiled statistics for the period 1946 – 2001 (see Figure 3). The interstate wars have been few in number during the entire second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while the internal conflicts have increased. In one study, using the Correlates of War data, the significant over-all increase in civil war since the 1960s is observed, but also an increasing international component in civil wars.<sup>9</sup> So while the interstate wars might decrease or remain few, internationalized civil war (like Iraq and Afghanistan) is increasing. This trend of course has far-

---

<sup>5</sup> For the dynamics between technological development and warfare, see Dupuy (1990).

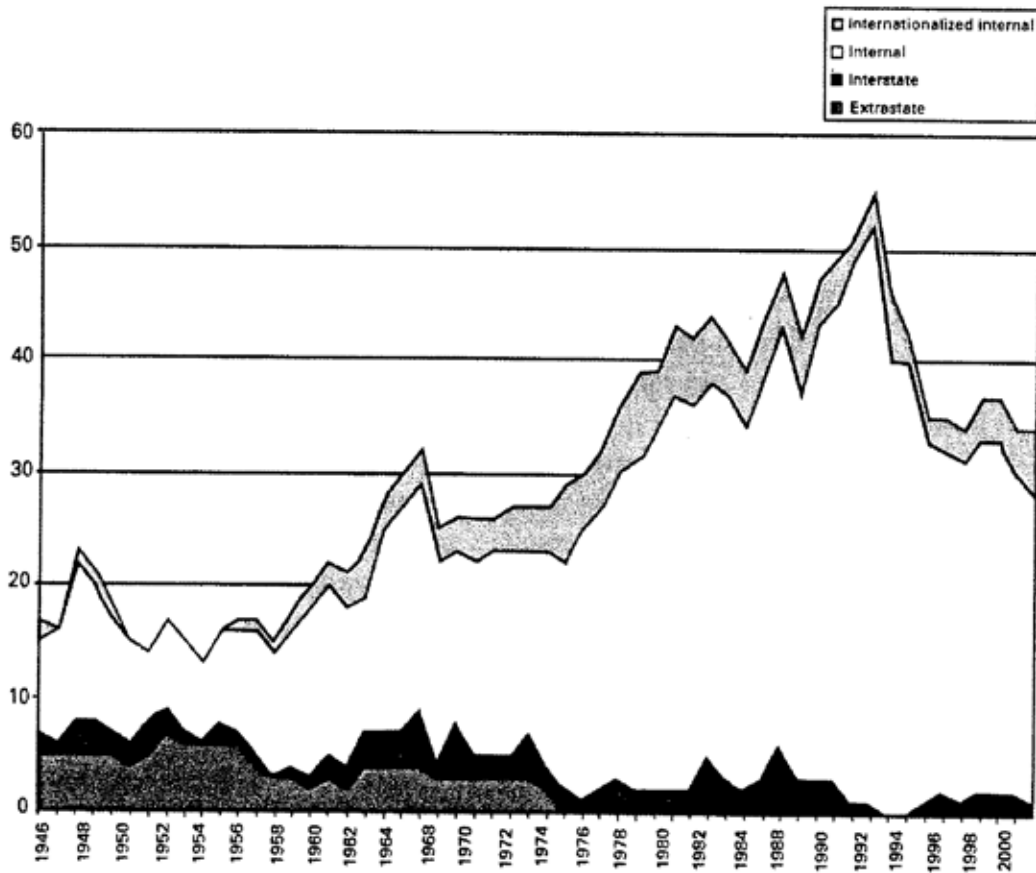
<sup>6</sup> For this theory, see Weart (1998).

<sup>7</sup> Harbom and Wallensteen (2009).

<sup>8</sup> Harbom and Wallensteen (2009) p. 70.

<sup>9</sup> Sarkees, Wayman and Singer (2003) p. 62.

reaching implications for the international system as a whole, since the internationalized civil wars under certain conditions could produce side-effects similar to large inter-state wars.

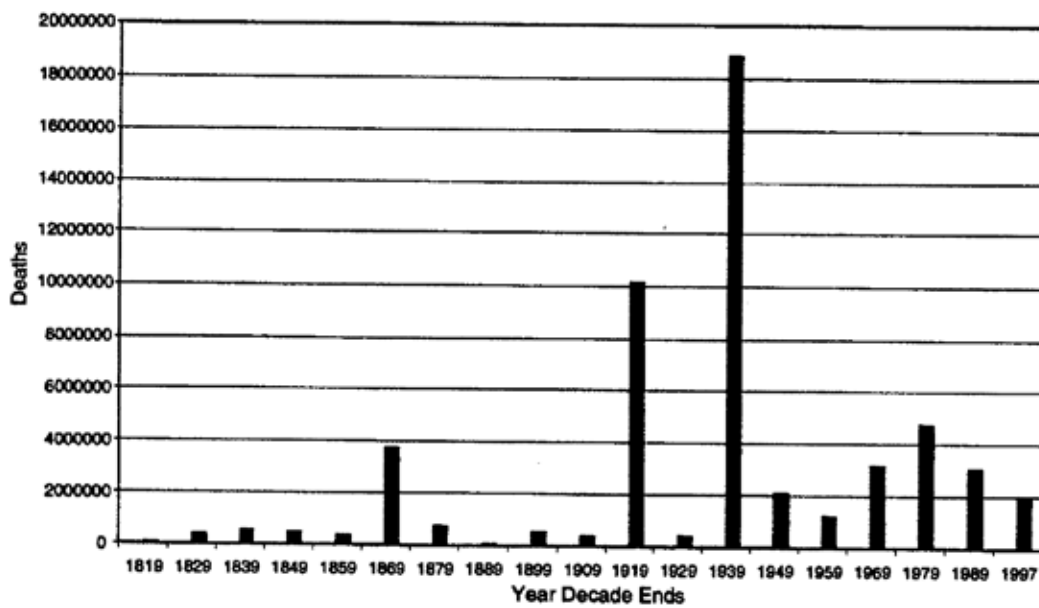


**In this figure, a conflict is coded by type for each year. Thus, a conflict can move from one type to another over time. For instance, the Kosovo conflict is coded as internal in 1998 and internationalized internal in 1999. In the aggregate figures for conflict for the entire period, such conflicts are coded at the 'highest' (i.e. most internationalized) level.**

Figure 3. Number of Armed Conflicts by Type, All Levels, 1946-2001 (Gleditsch et. al. 2002 p. 624)

Comparing number of wars is of course a very rough measure and could be grossly misleading. The two disastrous world wars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century resulted in more deaths than all other wars in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century taken together. However, the so called post-war period after 1945 resulted in a level of fatalities per decade equal to or exceeding the average for the two centuries, with the 1970s having the highest decade average after the world war decades (see Figure 4).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Sarkees, Wayman and Singer (2003) p. 64.



Total War Deaths per Decade (deaths reported by year in which war began; data for 1819 and 1997 normalized for ten years)

Figure 4. Total War Deaths per Decade 1819 – 1997 (Sarkees, Wayman, Singer 2003 p. 64).

Considerable efforts have been made to explain the possible causes of war and the changing pattern in frequency and type of armed conflicts. The Correlates of War project has identified certain characteristics of war-prone nations, that is nations that tend to be over-represented in the statistical dataset. Singer, when starting his work in the project in 1970, outlined as his main hypothesis that certain attributes would make states more war-prone than other, but that these attributes had to correlate with certain relational variables and with the attributes of the international system, or as he put it: “A nation must, in a sense, be in the ‘right’ setting if it is to get into war”.<sup>11</sup> Following Singers perspective, there are two set of problems related to the causes of war, the state (or non-state) actors and the political, geographical and historical context in which they operates. As it turned out, Singer and his colleagues could identify four recurring factors on the state level increasing the probability of war:<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Geller and Singer (2000) p. 191.

<sup>12</sup> Geller and Singer (2000) p. 193.

- Power status (major power).
- Power cycle (critical point if major power).
- Alliance (alliance member).
- Border (number of borders).

While these correlations do not represent a list of general causes of war, they reflect the mechanisms behind the initiation of many wars. Major powers are for a number of reasons more war-prone, something that is not only associated with 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century great power politics and the superpower phenomenon of the nuclear era, but also with the increase in internationalized internal conflicts (see above). Alliances and borders are quite obvious factors; alliances might increase collective protection and support but at the cost of increased risk of involvement in war if deterrence fails or is irrelevant, a country with few or no borders is unlikely to end up in disputes with neighbours over historical claims, cross-border minorities or resources. The power-cycle correlation is perhaps the most intriguing, indicating that major powers are more likely to end up in war on certain critical points where a disjuncture occurs between state interest and aspirations on the one hand and capabilities on the other. Major shifts in the status of major powers are therefore likely to increase the probability of wars.<sup>13</sup>

In a similar study, Sense and Vasquez found strong support for a step-to-war explanation, where the probability of war increases in relation to four factors, with the strongest correlation where all four are present simultaneously:<sup>14</sup>

- Territorial dispute rather than one concerning policy or regime.
- Both parties have relevant outside allies.
- A pattern of earlier armed disputes.
- An ongoing arms race.

Finally, Homer-Dixon, in an empiric study of environmental scarcities, found that this factor was an increasing direct and indirect cause for conflict in the developing world and that these conflicts probably were early signs of an upsurge of violence, induced or aggravated by scarcity: “The violence will usually be sub-national, persistent and diffuse”.<sup>15</sup>

To sum up, the empirically-based research on conflict patterns seems to indicate both a continuing (and possibly increasing) frequency of armed conflicts and a shift from interstate wars to internal conflicts and internationalized internal conflicts. As for causes, these both reflect structural factors like resources, land-claim and historical borders, and situational factors, especially the dynamics of great power politics and relations.

---

<sup>13</sup> Geller and Singer (2000) p. 59.

<sup>14</sup> Sense and Vasquez (2005) pp 631-633.

<sup>15</sup> Homer-Dixon (1998) pp 287-288.

## 5. Looking forward

---

The track-record of long term forecasts of world developments presented in the past is, as noted above, not too impressive.<sup>16</sup> While being able to identify important trends in basic fields as technology, global economy and demography, the ability to foresee major political shifts has been low. The forecasts usually reflect the time in which they have been produced, the issues on the agenda and the perception of future hopes and fears. The reason is not necessarily the lack of imagination, but the lack of theoretical tools to predict the nature of complex interacting developments, especially with the increasing uncertainty over time. Nothing would be more helpful than a model for the assessment of the likelihood and impact of future conflicts, but there is none. Considerable efforts are nevertheless devoted to the subject, but the end result is hardly more than informed guesswork, sometimes influenced by consensus-building among those involved. While the findings of conflict research, as discussed above, provides some kind of empirical and theoretical fundament for assessments, these assessments are bound to be marred by the rapidly increasing uncertainty of changing and interacting factors as the time-horizon is stretched out into the future. Anyway, with all methodological fingers crossed behind the back, something has to be said about the future that will emerge, forecasted or not.

In an ambitious attempt to produce a number of global future scenarios, the U.S. National Intelligence Council commissioned a study of global trends to 2025, starting with identifying a number of drivers assumed to have a “disproportionate influence on future events and possibilities”.<sup>17</sup> These drivers or variables are the globalizing economy, the demographic shifts, the “New Players”, the Scarcity of critical resources and the potential for future conflicts. The main assessments made in the report with a bearing on future conflicts are:

- A gradual transformation of the international system from U.S. domination to an increasingly multi-polar system, with the decreased relative role of U.S. in the world economy as the main driver.<sup>18</sup>
- EU is likely to lose in relative impact due to demographic transition and an inability to build stable institutions to act as a global actor and to bridge the chronically democratic deficit.
- Increased risks of conflicts emerging, both through competition in this transformed system and through scarcity of resources, due to climate change and consumption of non-renewable resources.
- The still low, but over time growing, risk of employment of nuclear weapons in regional conflicts. Use of nuclear weapons would probably result in major geopolitical changes as states adjust to a new perceived world order.<sup>19</sup>

Some of these conclusions have a direct bearing on future conflicts and the stability of the international system. The gradual transformation from the comparatively stable bipolar order to an emerging multi-polar system is likely to result in turbulent developments, in accordance with Geller and Singers conclusion regarding the power cycle of major powers (and Galtung's theory of rank-imbalance as a cause for conflicts). The U.S. study refers to a historical pattern, where *emerging* multi-polar systems have been more unstable than bipolar or even uni-polar systems.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Agrell (2006)

<sup>17</sup> *Global Trends 2025* (2008) foreword.

<sup>18</sup> *Global Trends 2025* (2008) p. xi.

<sup>19</sup> *Global Trends 2025* (2008) p. x.

<sup>20</sup> *Global Trends 2025* (2008) p. 29.



The emerging powers want an increased influence, while status quo or declining powers want to preserve theirs, a zero-sum game that could unleash or increase underlying conflicts. Among the presumed losers are, apart from the U.S., Japan and EU, both for long-term structural reasons. Taken together, the trends identified point towards a less Western-dominated or influenced world order/disorder.

Energy resources, consumption and technologies is a sphere where huge changes are seen as inevitable due to the decline of oil and gas resources and the shift in energy systems in the face of coming shortage and the pressure from demands to counter climate change. These changes can affect patterns of conflicts in different ways. An increased competition over non-explored resources is highly likely (see below), but also the opposite, that new emerging technologies will render “old” energy resources less attractive. Oil and gas-producing countries thus could face the advantage of rising prices, but a crisis when production declines or economic disaster if the market changes to new energy systems.<sup>21</sup>

In the European context, the decline of Norwegian energy production and the expected drop in Russian gas production, would most likely result in a momentum for exploring finding in new more remote areas.<sup>22</sup> This could develop into a competition over the natural resources in the Arctic region, where the legal claims are overlapping, international legal frameworks are insufficient and the potential for prolonged conflicts thus considerable.

Looking beyond the 2025 limit of the U.S. study, it seems not only likely but more or less inevitable that a 50-100 year period will contain both fundamental changes in the international system and the emergence of structural conflicts within the system, with an increased risk of both internal instability - the U.S. study points at the historically well documented pattern of internal unrest as a result of frustrated expectations on improved living standard.<sup>23</sup>

To sum up some patterns can be identified concerning five aspects of future conflicts:

1. Armed conflicts will hardly disappear or become an insignificant element in the periphery of a worldwide security system. The causes of conflict are multiplying and the development of means to resort to arms has not decreased – World military expenditures and arms productions only temporarily dipped following the end of the Cold War.
2. The “war statistics” should not be misread as an indication that there will be an average of 10-20 ongoing armed conflicts annually, and that conflicts thus represent a constant rather than a factor of change in the international system. The war statistics compare very different cases, from local wars not having any consequences whatsoever outside the region in which they are fought and major wars involving a large segment of UN members and affecting global trade routes, energy supply and world economy (Iraq 1991 and 2003+). While the war-statistics is useful for an analysis of causes on an aggregated level, it is not a basis for a forecast regarding possible impacts of future conflicts.
3. Major transitions in the international system appear as likely, if not more or less inevitable; that a world system, as it can be described at present would prevail to the beginning of the next century seems utterly remote. *Something* will inevitably change, and it is not certain that there will be one well-defined, legally based system.

---

<sup>21</sup> *Global Trends 2025* (2008) p. 30.

<sup>22</sup> On Russian energy resources, see Oxenstierna (2009) pp. 27-37.

<sup>23</sup> *Global Trends 2025* (2008) p. 30.

4. While resource scarcity (energy, raw-materials, water, cropland) might not be a general direct cause for major conflicts, it will most likely be a rapidly growing factor in processes leading to both internal and international conflicts

5. A widening gap between an increasingly globalized economy and states with decreasing control over the economic system and the material base of the societies, with a subsequent potential for social unrest, ideological radicalization and internal and external conflict as diversion of dissatisfaction is considerable

Four scenarios can serve to illustrate the span of thinkable developments regarding future conflicts and global stability/instability.

*Future 1: Contained conflicts and gradual change*

In this scenario the future transition follows a course similar to the last two decades, where armed conflicts have been short or geographically contained – although with severe regional impact - and where the international system has changed incrementally without major ruptures after the collapse of the bipolar order. This scenario has least impact on the Future Forest scenario process.

*Future 2: Discontinuous change and major conflicts*

Here the redistribution of power and management of conflicts cannot be handled within the existing system and system failures results in major and possibly prolonged periods of conflicts, with or without the employment of armed force. In this scenario there would occur major disruption in the process of economic globalization due to uncertainty or lack of cooperation and functioning channels for cooperation. Armed conflicts could have large impact globally and regionally. This scenario would have considerable indirect impact on the FF scenario process (see Appendix 1).

*Future 3: A weakened or disintegrating EU*

This could be a sub-scenario to both Future 1 and 2, the latter perhaps more likely. Here the internal (though hardly violent) conflicts within the Union and in the member states, along with inability to handle external threats and challenges could lead to a reversed process, compared to the period of stepwise integration from the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. This scenario is probably the development that would affect the FF-scenario process most, through a wide range of consequences for politics, economy and political general climate in the societies. If the EU-system would come under severe external and/or internal strain (not necessary being involved directly in armed conflicts), this would affect all areas of cooperation and governance, as well as perceptions in Swedish society and politics.

*Future 4: Regional conflicts over non-renewable resources*

This could be linked to Future 3, but could also emerge in another setting. A growing relative importance of energy sources and routes could profoundly change the geo-strategic conditions in Northern Europe and transform the area from a protected to an exposed position, as would be the case with a stepped up competition over presumed or confirmed resources in the Arctic. Even if such a process most likely would not develop into an armed conflict, it would be the development that most directly would have consequences for the FF-scenario process, though mainly through impact on other drivers.

## 6. Conclusions

---

The conflict driver is extremely complex and the frequency, character and impact of conflicts cannot be assessed other than in very broad terms, if at all. We can however be absolute certain that violent conflicts will continue to constitute a serious problem for the global system. There is no visible, and actually no thinkable, development that would bring about Immanuel Kant's vision of an eternal peace based on enlightenment and democracy. Not even the outspoken proponents of the democratic peace theory believe in a rapid and non-violent transition to a new world order. The long-term change of gravity from inter-state to intra-state conflicts is also becoming less significant due to the growing internationalization of the latter.

The dark cloud on the horizon is a major war, or a serious and long-lasting conflict not necessary culminating in war but affecting the stability and key functions of the international system as a whole. For a region in the periphery, and with a focus on renewable natural resources, the impact of a major war or a conflict leading to the break-up of the international system could be similar: decrease in international trade, reduction or loss of markets, the imposing of political, economic or physical constraints dictated by a broad span of security concerns.

However, when it comes to the Future Forests scenarios, direct impact of conflicts seems remote and presupposes major changes in the regional geo-strategic and geopolitical premises. A violent conflict directly affecting the forest resources or land accessibility is not only unlikely but also irrelevant, since the whole political, economical and social basis for the use of forest resources would be affected or completely altered.

The kind of conflicts that could be more relevant in terms of the scenarios is a bit down the conflict ladder. An escalating competition over energy resources affecting the Arctic region, the Eurasian mainland and Caucasus could seriously destabilize the European security system and divert focus and resources from other sectors. While not primarily affecting the forest resources there would be an indirect spill-over from deteriorated security situation on trade and international cooperation, in this case especially with Russia. While the likelihood of such a development cannot be assessed, the factors that could cause conflict – energy demands and shifting availability of present and possible future energy resources – can be predicted. This is not to say that a regional conflict over energy resources is more likely than a grave international conflict, only that the factors behind the former can be identified and to some extent quantified, while the latter due to the possible interaction of an unknown number of factors is genuinely unpredictable. However, some unpredictable events can be highly likely.

Another kind of conflict development that could have considerable effects is a process of stagnation or disintegration of the European project. This appears as the future development that would have the most profound effects on every aspect of the societies involved in the integration process. This development appears as more likely than a major armed conflict affecting the European security system, given the impact of structural factors.

# References

---

Wilhelm Agrell, Varför slår hotprognoser så ofta fel?, i Bertel Heurlin och Sten Rynning, *Det 21. århundredes trusler*, Dansk Institut for Internationale Studier, København 2006.

Sten Carlsson, Jerker Rosén, *Svensk historia band 2*, Stockholm. Svenska bokförlaget 1970.

Simon Duke, *United States Military Forces and Installations in Europe*, SIPRI, Oxford University Press 1989.

Trevor N. Dupuy, *The Evolution of Weapons and Warfare*, New York: Da Capo Press 1990.

Daniel S. Geller and J. David Singer, *Nations at War. A Scientific Study of International Conflicts*, Cambridge University Press 2000.

Douglas M. Gibler and Meredith Reid Sarkees, Measuring Alliances: The Correlates of War Formal Interstate Alliance Dataset, 1816-2000, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Mar., 2004), pp. 211-222.

Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World, National Intelligence Council 2008, [www.dni.gov/nic/NIC\\_2025\\_project.html](http://www.dni.gov/nic/NIC_2025_project.html)

*Grønland under den kolde krig. Dansk og amerikansk sikkerhedspolitik 1945-68*, Dansk Udenrigspolitisk Institut 1997

Lotta Harbom and Peter Wallensteen, Patterns of major armed conflicts, 1999-2008, *SIPRI Yearbook 2009*, Oxford University Press 2009.

Thomas F. Homer-Dixon, Environmental Scarcities and Violent Conflicts: Evidence from Cases, in Ken Conca and Geoffrey D. Dablenko, *Green Planet Blues*, Boulders: Westview Press, 1998.

Michael Howard, *The Causes of War*, London: Temple Smith, 1983.

Evan Luard, *War in International Society*, London: I.B. Tauris &Co 1986.

Susanne Oxenstierna, *Russia in Perspective. Scenarios of Russia's Economic Future 10 to 20 Years Ahead*, FOI-R—2774—SE, June 2009.

Meredith Rein Sarkees, Frank Whelon Wayman, J. David Singer, Inter-State, Intra-State, and Extra-State Wars: A Comprehensive Look at Their Distribution over Time, 1816-1997, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 47 No. 1 (Mar., 2003), pp. 49-70.

Paul D. Senese and John A. Vasquez, Assessing the Steps to War, *B.J. Pol.S.* Vol 35 (2005) pp 607-633.

Spencer R. Weart, *Never at War. Why Democracies Will Not Fight One Another*, Yale University Press 1998

## Appendix 1. Effects of geopolitics on other drivers

---

The conflict driver could mainly be regarded as an indirect one, that is having an impact through other drivers through disruption of or impact on politics, economy and society as a whole. This first of all could affect the following drivers:

Driver	Effects
Energy	This is an obvious link, both in case of conflicts over energy resources and/or energy flows and in case of disruption in the international system and international trade.
Governance	Direct consequences in terms of lost sovereignty – though less likely. Indirect consequences by affecting EU-policy and the influence of the EU-system and international trade regulations – this is far more likely.
Demography	Indirect impact through forced migration due to consequences of violent conflicts or the economic and/or ecological effects of conflicts.
Land use	Possible impact through militarization due to developments in technology, military strategy and/or regional competition.
Markets	Likely indirect impact through the effects of conflicts on world economy and conditions in regions affected in one way or other by conflicts.
Norms and values	Likely though unpredictable indirect impact on perception of global values and global responsibility.

## Appendix 2. Impact of other drivers on geopolitics

---

This is to some extent be dealt with in section 4 (identified causes of violent conflicts). The most obvious drivers with relevance for conflicts are the macro trends like climate change, demography, new technology and the development of the global economy, along with religious and ideological movements (the latter not included in the 10 drivers) along with the stability and function of international conflict-managing systems. Conflicts do not appear out of nowhere as a kind of security disasters or curses, they could be regarded as the *malfunction* of processes encompassed in other drivers concerning sovereignty, system-building, governance, economy, use of renewable and non-renewable resources and social mobilization based on values.