

## The 'Mapping Interests in Conflict Areas' tool

A work in progress, January 2007

### *I. Background*

#### **The Greed vs. grievance debate**

The idea to develop a 'Mapping Interests in Conflict Areas' tool has grown out of fascination but also discontent with the 'Greed vs. Grievance' debate, a lively exchange between economists and social scientists.

Proponents of the greed theory argue that wars are driven by economic incentives. In their line of thinking, conflict entrepreneurs are profit seekers who use war to enrich themselves. To them, waging a war is comparable to running a business. The first economists who started to write on conflict issues were led by Jack **Hirshleifer**. He developed a rational choice theory in which people in a society have to choose between producing the goods they need or taking it by force from others. Convinced of the fact that there is no single or universal model for conflict, Hirshleifer developed several models, each appropriate for different conflict situations. The Hirshleifer models have a few characteristics in common:

- the decision makers seek the optimal outcome for their own needs
- the separate and private decisions result in an equilibrium situation
- the decision makers are subject to Macchiavelli's Theorem, which means that no one will ever neglect to seize the opportunity to exploit anyone else.

The best known economic author who published on the topic is Paul **Collier** of the World bank. His research on civil wars is based on statistical methods in which he analyses the correlations between a set of greed/grievance variables and the incidence/duration of war. In his model, which has become commonplace in all World Bank policy publications, poverty is the central factor that explains armed conflict. The failure of economic development is in other words the root cause of conflict.

Another "greed author" who is often cited is David **Keen**. He stresses the fact that economic reasoning influences all those who are involved in an armed conflict. Both the military leader and the foot soldier often have economic motivations driving their actions. Moreover, economics pervades in all aspects of warfare and all phenomena surrounding it. He points for example to the role of relief aid and its capacity to fuel violence.

**Main sources:**

Collier P., *Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and their Implications for policy* (Washington: World Bank, 2000), 22p.

Collier P. e.a., *Breaking the Conflict Trap. Civil War and Development Policy* (Washington: World Bank, 2003), 221 p.

Hirshleifer J., *Theorizing about Conflict* (Los Angeles: UCLA Department of Economics, 1995), 36p.

Keen D., *The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil Wars*, Adelphi Paper No. 320 (London: IISS, June 1998), pp. 1-88.

Proponents of the grievance model believe that wars emerge from the opposition to perceived or actual injustice. In their view, people fight because of oppression, inequality, discrimination etc. These views are very popular among historians and social scientists. The grievance idea is also the dominant explanation given for conflict situations by mainstream media.

**Azar** is the spiritual father of the theory of "Protracted Social Conflict" (PSC), which is after twenty years still in line with current research findings. In his theory he uses the "identity group" as the basic level of analysis. Identity groups can be based on racial, ethnic, religious or other criteria. According to the PSC model, the problematic relationship between such groups and the state can escalate into violent conflict.

Azar argues that the deprivation of needs of identity groups is the underlying source for armed conflict. He distinguishes three categories of needs:

- Acceptance needs (recognition of identity and culture)
- Access needs (political and economic participation)
- Security needs (nutrition, housing, physical security,...)

The behaviour and strategy of identity groups throughout a conflict situation have been closely studied by T. R. **Gurr**. He distinguishes 4 types of groups:

- Ethnonationalists: large and regionally concentrated ethnic groups who live within one state or across the boundaries of different states striving for greater autonomy or independent statehood
- Indigenous people: descendants of the original inhabitants of conquered or colonized regions devoted to some sort of self-determination
- Ethnoclasses: ethnically or culturally distinct minorities with immigrant origins who occupy distinct social strata and want to improve their treatment and status. A peculiar type of ethnoclass is the "dominant minority"
- Communal contenders: ethnic groups whose main political aim is to share power. In some cases communal contenders can shift to a strategy of autonomy.

**Main sources:**

A good overview of Edward Azars theory on Protracted Social Conflict can be found in: Miall H., Ramsbotham O. & Woodhouse T., *Contemporary Conflict Resolution* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 268p.

Harff B. & Gurr T. B., *Ethnic Conflict in World Politics. Second Edition* (Oxford: Westview Press, 2004), 237 p.

Our overview of the Greed vs. Grievance debate is brief and simplified. Many nuances have been added and the last three years, several authors have tried to go “beyond greed and grievance”. They have left the idea of an or/or distinction and started to investigate the ways in which greed and grievance interact and reinforce each other as drivers of armed conflict. This proves that the debate has given an important impulse to all those working in the field of peace research to think and work more interdisciplinary.

A second accomplishment of the debate lies in the impact it has on policy makers and the general public. It has opened the eyes of many and made them realise that war itself is sometimes the principal and final purpose of warring parties.

A third merit of the debate is that it has shown convincingly and stressed repeatedly the link between poverty and armed conflict. This puts the problem into a broader development perspective, which places the responsibility with all actors in international relations including governments, international organisations and multinational companies.

Despite its value, the debate remains rather impractical for policy oriented research. We briefly sum up what we believe to be its main shortcomings.

- The debate narrows the possible drivers of armed conflict down to two and creates two exclusive camps. Other explanations are largely ignored.
- The participants in this theoretical exchange analyse datasets to explain armed conflicts in general but this is of little practical value to assess a specific war situation. It is in other words a theory about the drivers of civil war but it doesn't supply us with a research method for case-studies.
- The quest for a general insight, applicable on all (civil) wars, creates an analytic bias because the explanation for any war situation is already at hand before the developments on the ground has even been studied.
- The Greed vs. Grievance debate is a simplistic story, easily picked up by anyone who encounters it and therefore a bit dangerous. It ignores the complexity of the war phenomenon and leads to statements such as “the war in Iraq is all about the oil money”.

**Enrichment of the debate**

Another important perspective on the drivers of war stems from environmental researchers. Influential policy reports from the Club of Rome, Brundtland and green organisations such as the Worldwatch Institute describe the physical limits of our planet, the degradation of the environment and the violence that can occur from the resulting competition. Within the environmentalists ranks we find two opposing schools who have established quite different views on the complex relationships

between environment and conflict. A first position is advocated by the **Neo-Malthusians** who believe that declining resources per capita are an increasingly important cause of violent conflicts, especially in developing countries. They claim that the scarcity of renewable resources exaggerates certain stresses within countries, leading to violence. Homer-Dixon from the Toronto School defines four critical renewable resources (cropland, forests, fresh water and fish). A radically different theory on environment and conflict was developed by **political ecologists**. The starting point for their analysis is the interaction between social and natural processes. Instead of categorizing resource related conflicts as a 'primitive' and 'immediate' local survival technique, they try to find the historical and social processes in which the resource-related conflict is embedded. Moreover, instead of taking the scarcity phenomenon for granted, political ecologists often turn the equation on its head, suggesting that violence in the South is frequently a matter of control over abundant resources.

### Main sources

Homer-Dixon T.F., "Environmental Scarcity, Mass Violence, and the Limits to Ingenuity", *Current History*, Vol. 95, No. 604 (November 1996), pp. 359-365.

Peluso N.L & Watts M. (eds.), *Violent Environments* (Cornell: University Press, 2001), 453p.

**Geopolitics and political geography** can be considered as two sides of the same coin. Both study the same subject but the first discipline is for the most part descriptive whereas the second is more explanatory/interpretative in nature. As a consequence the border line between the two is rather narrow and research activities of political geographers often end up in geopolitical output and vice versa.

Geopolitics is the study of the pursuit of power, applied to situations of human and physical geography. The word dates from 1900 and it was a very popular discipline at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the geopolitical view, war results from the competition between states for the acquisition of primacy. Primacy stems from the geographic characteristics of the territory controlled by a state. Therefore "the world is actively 'spatialized', divided up, 'labelled', sorted out into a hierarchy of places of greater or lesser importance<sup>1</sup>. Geopolitical studies focus on two types of variables. On the one hand they analyse 'permanent' geographical features like lakes, mountains and forests but also language, religion and ethnicities. On the other hand they have to take into account certain historical developments and events which change the role of geography in the pursuit of power. Technological evolutions like the growth of the aviation industry are a case in point, but also mega trends like globalisation and regional integration and cooperation.

### Sources:

Chauprade A., *Introduction à l'analyse géopolitique* (Paris: Ellipses, 1999), 320p.

## II. Our research model

### Theoretical assumptions and choices

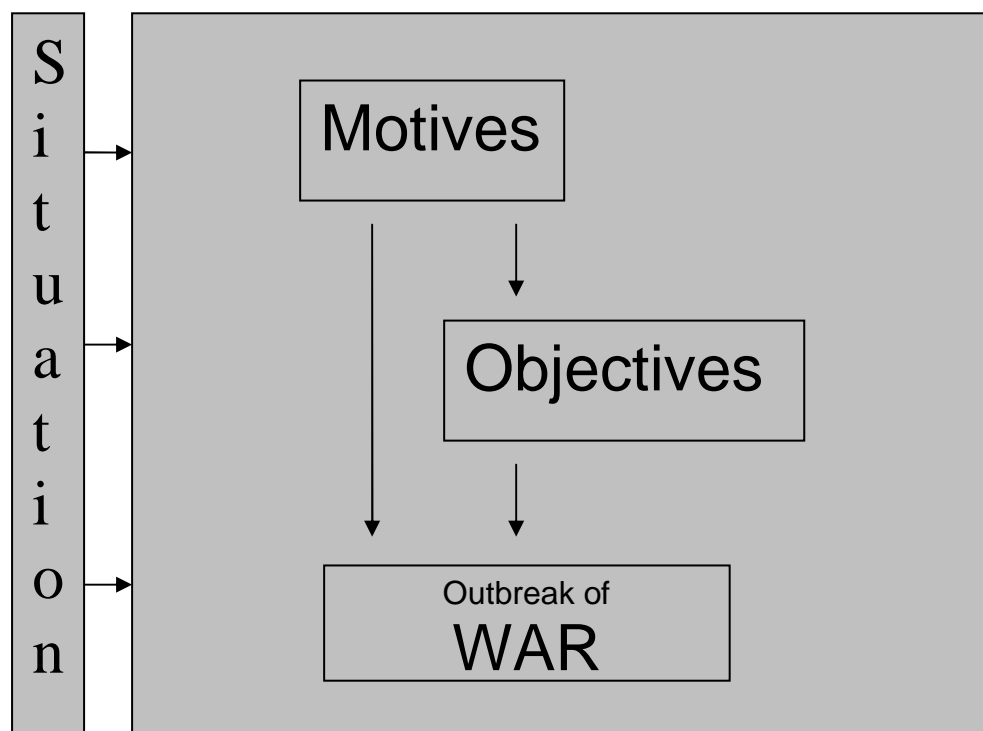
It is our aim to develop an analytic tool applicable on different types of armed conflicts, regardless of the way they are categorized. However, conflicts without a clear and limited territorial dimension are beyond the scope of our instrument. Since the Al Qaeda terror war and the American war on terror are waged on a global scale, they cannot be analysed using our geographic tool.

The 'mapping' tool focuses primarily on the role of motivation as a cause of war. Our clear choice does not imply a contestation of the idea that opportunity is an important explanatory variable for armed conflict. We believe both elements are to be taken into account when explaining the causes of warfare.

### The model

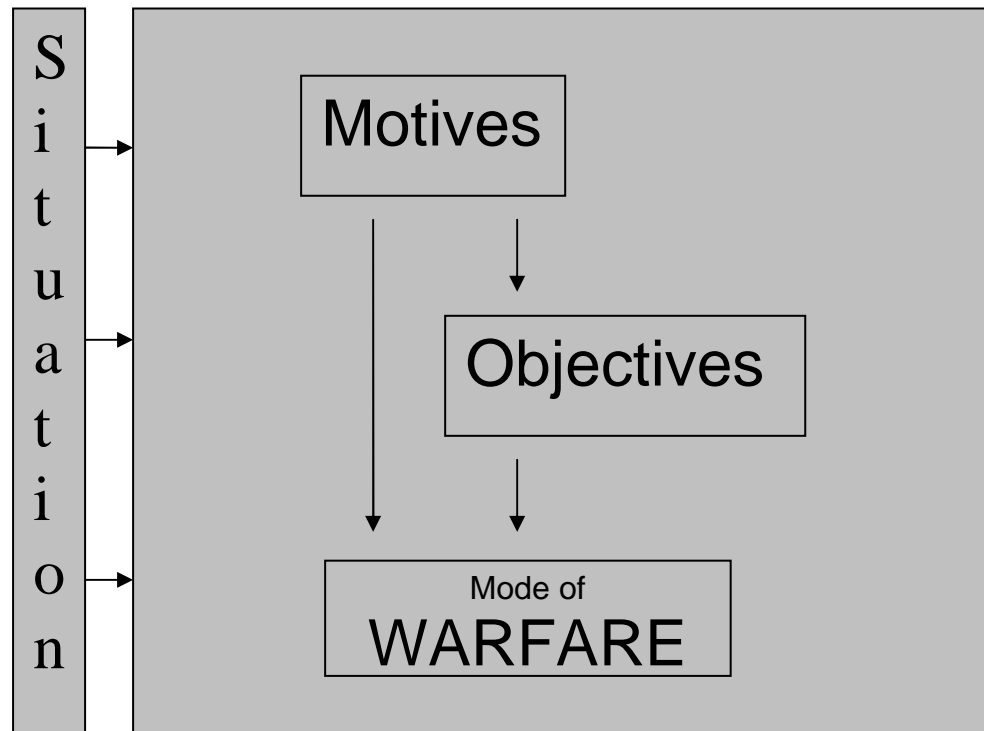
Before we enunciate our model we first need to make clear what it is not. It should not be seen as an overall theoretical model that explains 'wars'. Therefore the reader should neither be looking for any predictive value. Our theoretical model is the visualization of the reasoning that constitutes our tool. It starts from the finding that there is a war (or at least an armed conflict) going on (Fig. 1). We perceive this war as a tool that is used to attain a certain goal or objective, for example the secession from an existing state. Such objectives are driven by a certain motivation, for example people want to secede because they are being discriminated and oppressed. Why some motives lead to the outbreak of war and others don't depends on opportunities and other situational factors.

**Fig. 1**



Motivations and objectives are the drivers of war and as such they will influence the way in which a war is being waged (Fig. 2). Naturally these are not the only factors determining the mode of warfare. The relations between motivations, objectives and modes of warfare are affected by an array of situational factors. The military balance for example can have a serious impact on the behaviour of warring parties.

**Fig. 2**

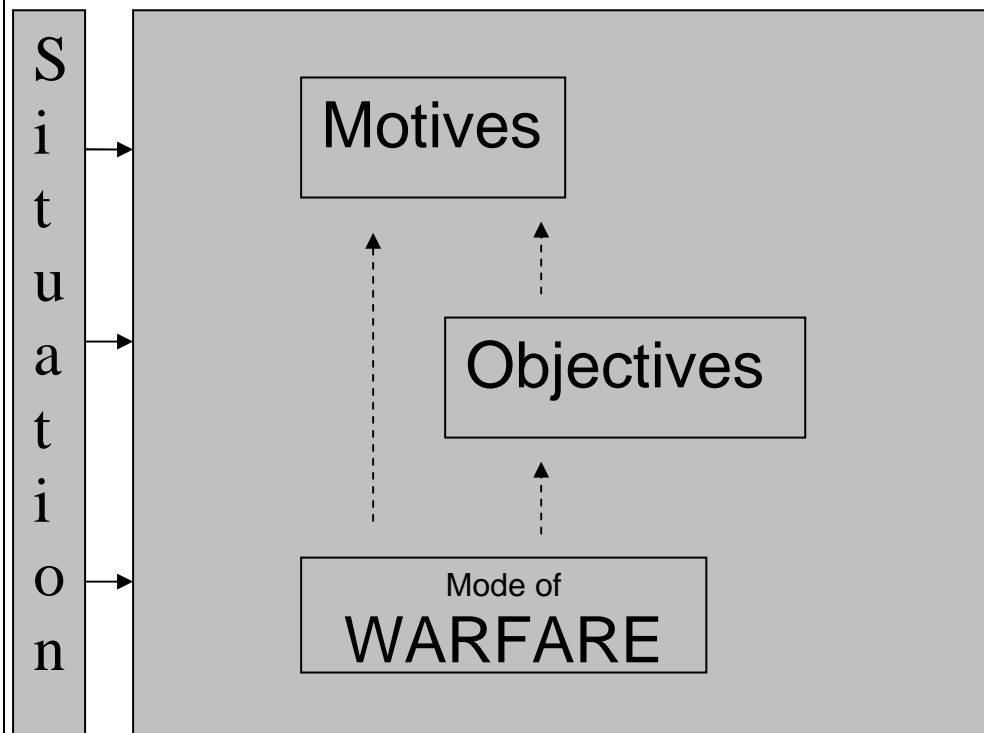


If we want to expose the drivers of warring parties, we need to start from the only objective information we can rely on: the facts on the field. Warring parties may claim to be driven by certain motives and towards certain objectives but this could be a mere representation. Observers on the ground often have honest and well-founded opinions on the subject, but in the end they are still a matter of secondary interpretation. Assuming that motives of warring parties shape their objectives and their mode of warfare, our tool wants to analyse concrete military actions and decisions, and retrace these back to what drove provoked them (Fig. 3).

**Warfare** is the dependent variable of our model. We define it as the way a war is fought geographically. Who is fighting where? Where not? Which areas are most heavily defended? Which areas are most fiercely attacked?

While analysing conflict one needs to make a distinction between the aims (objectives) of warfare and the motivation for it. The aims of a war are an answer to the question to which end it is fought. War motivation on the other hand explains why warring parties want to attain a certain goal. Motivation precedes objective. There is in other words a direct relationship between the motivation for waging war and the purpose it serves. Different motivations for warfare create different aims. A warring party can be driven by multiple motives and objectives. We have identified 5 different **motivations**:

**Fig. 3**



Profit is the central motivation in the 'Greed' theory of conflicts. War can create enormous personal gains, which might be enough reason to wage one. Profit motivated conflicts entail phenomena like: pillaging, organised crime, preying on natural resources, preying on economic activity etc.

Grievance: In every society there are groups and individuals who oppose the current political and/or social situation. Their dissatisfaction is caused by feelings of inequality, oppression, discrimination, hatred and injustice. When these feelings remain unanswered they can become a driver of violent conflict.

Survival: People or peoples who feel threatened in their survival resort quite often to violence to safeguard their future. Essential elements for survival are: access to food, access to water, physical security, shelter, living space and outlet possibilities.

Humanitarian considerations: Waging war to save lives. That is the ratio behind military operations such as humanitarian interventions. New combatants join an existing conflict to prevent or stop genocide or a humanitarian disaster.

Power: History has seen many examples of politicians using war to win more political or territorial power. Wars driven by the search for power are wars for conquest. The relationship between power and geography has always been the central topic in geopolitics.

With respect to what warring parties want to achieve we make a distinction between four different types of **objectives**. Sometimes, different objectives can interact in a single conflict.

**Military control:** When a conflict party aims to take military control over a certain territory, it needs to establish a military presence in all key areas and secure all borders. Regime change or territorial adjustments are not the primary objective.

**Territorial change:** In territorial disputes, a change of borders is at stake. Annexation, irredentism and secession are the three classical examples of (armed) territorial strife.

**Political change:** Some insurgents only seek increased participation in politics. In Colombia for example, rebelling Indians of the Quintin Lame movement attempted to implement a project of national transformation by conducting guerrilla warfare in rural regions. In practice however, most warring parties fighting for political change will have a complete political overthrow as their main objective. During an overthrow, a leader or party is forced from power.

**The absence of the State of Law:** Some warring parties don't have military, territorial or political goals. Their only objective is to obstruct peace and continue the war situation. Such warring parties are identified by Stephen John Stedman as peace spoilers. Stedman's original view on spoilers was quite narrow. In later literature however, the term was often used for all warring parties who deliberately tried to prolong a war situation.

Although we focus on motives and objectives of warring parties, we are aware that there are also other factors influencing the areas in which a war is fought. We have put all these factors under the variable '**situation**'. If we want to draw conclusions on the drivers of the conflict from manoeuvres on the ground, these situational influences need to be made explicit and filtered out. We make a distinction between the influence of deliberate military actions and other, mostly coincidental, circumstances.

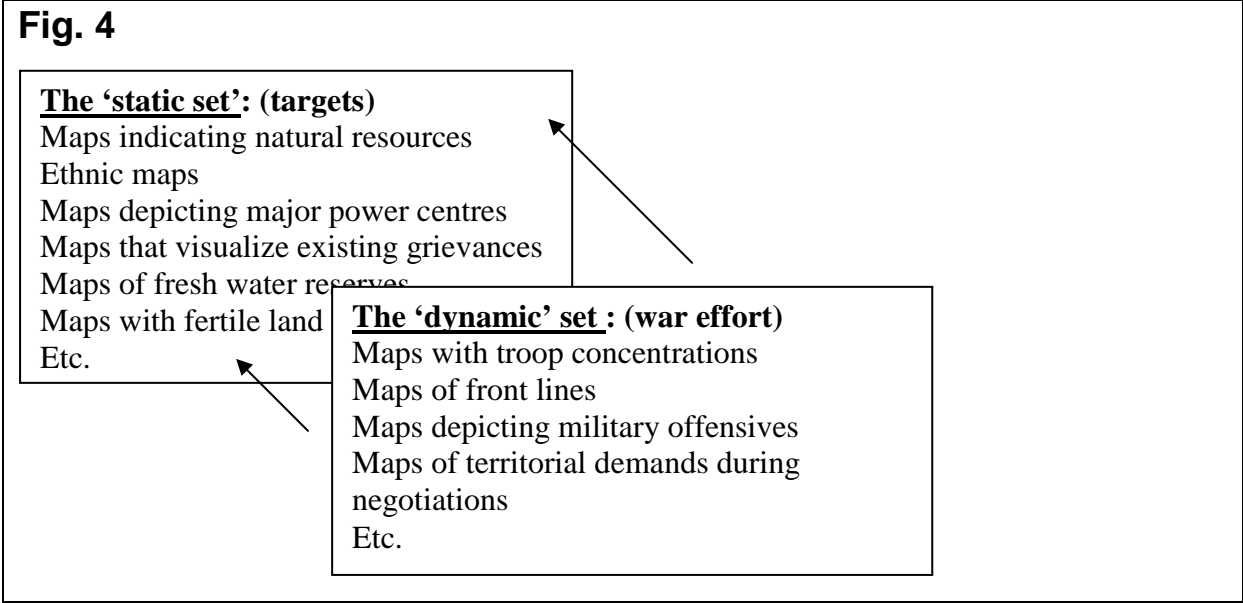
**Military logic:** Armies or armed groups operate following a certain strategy. Within this overall strategy they use several tactics to apply their available means with maximum efficiency. These tactics follow a logic of their own, irrespective of the underlying conflict drivers. Points in case are operations of warring parties trying to impede their opponents from achieving a certain goal. In such cases, armies are not pursuing their own objectives but reacting on the actions of others.

**Other situational factors:** The category of other situational factors is very diverse and probably even endless. While some are rather structural, such as the climate and terrain, others are rather haphazard, such as sudden bad weather or a landslide blocking a road. Both can have a considerable impact on military actions. When analysing conflict, one must account for these important local situational factors, influencing warfare in a myriad of ways.

## **The tool**

The central feature of our research tool are two different sets of maps. The first set of maps is *static*. These maps present the location of all possible targets of the parties involved in the conflict. The targets on these maps are based on the different theories on the drivers (motivations) of armed conflict as discussed above. This set is labelled as static because in general the targets of warring parties are features with a relatively fixed geographic location (For example: the capital, fertile land, diamond mine etc.). The second collection is *dynamic*. It visualizes the areas in which the warring parties concentrate their military or diplomatic efforts. Since war zones and front lines often change during warfare, we have labelled this second set as dynamic. Each of the maps is only valid for a limited and well-defined period of time.

During our analysis we will literally put maps of the dynamic set on maps of the static set (Fig. 4). In this manner we will be able to check which war targets are present on a territory where heavy fighting is taking place or tough negotiations are held on. From this comparison we can derive the intentions of the warring parties and thus the motivation that drives them.



We will analyse the results from overlaying these maps by making use of GIS software. This software allows us to apply some basic statistics on the data collected and rendered on our maps. In addition, it will immediately display the results of these calculations. After studying our maps and analysing them statistically we will summarize our findings in a written report. Throughout the text we will constantly refer to the maps. This will serve as a control mechanism to make sure that our written analysis is directly linked to findings from the maps.

**Related research on geography and conflict**

The IPIS 'Mapping Interests in Conflict Areas' tool integrates knowledge from a variety of academic disciplines. Because of its method however, it is associated most with research activities within political geography/geopolitics. It is therefore in this field that we have to look for related research. The element of cartography and the use of GIS for analytic purposes is not new in the field of peace research. A very innovative geographic approach is being developed by scholars like Halvard Buhaug, Nils Petter Gleditsch and others at the Peace Research Institute of Oslo (PRIO). The PRIO Centre for the Study of Civil War (CSCW) conducts large quantitative studies of civil wars. There are important parallels between their work and the work from World Bank analysts such as Paul Collier. The major distinction between the two approaches is that CSCW is developing a system to conduct statistical conflict research on a sub-national level. In a new research design CSCW abandons the habitual country level of analysis and divides the geographic space of its analyses in grids of 100 by 100 km. The researchers attribute to each grid certain values on geographic variables they want to relate to conflict. The central research questions Halvard Buhaug and other researchers at CSCW want to answer are:

To what extent are geographic factors like topography, natural resources, climate and conflict location key determinants of course and outcome of internal conflicts?

How do geographic elements interact with military attributes of the warring parties?

The IPIS mapping tool is broader and at the same time narrower than the CSCW approach. It is broader because it is not only interested in the conflict role of physical geographic elements but also other factors that can be plotted on a map. It is narrower because it is not intended to provide an overall insight in conflict drivers and dynamics but to explain the behaviour of individual warring parties.

### **Advantages and applicability**

There are some specific uses and advantages about the geographical tool we would like to highlight:

The resulting material can be used to sustain a written analysis as well as an oral presentation. It offers a considerable surplus in comparison with mere text.

It is easily accessible and therefore useful for a very diverse audience. Examples of interested groups are: international workers, the press, policy makers and the general public.

The analysis is automatically interactive since readers or audiences have access to the sources (the maps) it is based on. They can follow every reasoning made and comment on it.

Because the sources are shared with the interested public, the analysis is open for external control, which is an extra guarantee for objectivity.

New information or developments can easily be added to previous findings. All it takes is one new map to be compared with the originals.

Applying the tool will shed a new light on the interaction of different war motivations because it will reveal contradictions, parallels etc.

In some cases it might reveal intentions or drivers which were previously hidden beneath the discourse of warring parties.

It will be particularly interesting to compare the maps of one conflict with maps of other conflicts.

### **III. The tool in practice**

IPIS will try to develop the 'mapping' approach into a practical tool which directly applicable. As an illustration we have added our main ideas on how we will generate the greed and grievance maps.

#### **Greed maps**

Drawing the greed maps will be one of the easier tasks within the mapping method. A war driven by profit will be located in an area that can generate economic advantages. Most of these profitable zones can be identified and directly pinpointed on a map. We distinguish 5 main categories of economic targets.

*Natural resources:* The most important maps in our greed collection are those that convey the sites of natural resources. On these maps we clearly indicate the exact location and the nature of the resources present in the country at war. We add any additional information that might be relevant in a table linked to the map. Moreover we attribute a certain value to each site that reflects its worth/importance. In the absence of law and order, all natural resources can be profitable to control/exploit, but some are more suitable than others. We will focus on oil, natural gas, diamonds and other gems, copper, gold, chromite, tantalite and timber. These resources were taken from the priority list of the PRIO CSCW. In general they have a considerable value and are easy to loot. The list contains those resources most preyed upon by warring parties, but surely it is not exhaustive.

*Illicit substances:* Several armed groups in the world rely on the production of drugs to finance their operations. We should make a separate layer for our maps that gives an overview of the areas in which the different stages of the 'production process' are located. It should include: crop fields, warehouses, laboratories and transport routes. It will be a considerable challenge to get hold of such information.

*Loot:* The 'loot' maps should present zones of interest for fighters and commanders, profiting from the lawlessness during wartime and looking for opportunities to pillage or racketeer (in other words: the most promising places for banditry). A basic loot map should be composed of middle and upper class residential areas, Industrial sites and major shopping areas. Depending on the case, other loot maps can be drawn. One example could be an overview of depopulated areas in conflicts involving ethnic cleansing or refugee streams. Such areas offer good opportunities for enrichment through the seizure of land, property etc.

*Trade and distribution routes:* Trade routes can be used for legal trade or illegal smuggling. As such they do not generate money themselves but they facilitate profit made from the exploitation of natural resources or illicit substances. Sometimes however, controlling routes does generate income because it offers good opportunities for extortion. A war profiteer doesn't need to take control over the whole transport route, it is sufficient for him to have access to a few 'choke points'. A point in case is the practice of several armed groups around the world to attack pipelines of oil companies to receive 'protection' money.

*Aid:* A last greed map should picture the presence and activities of relief organisations. The food and goods these organisations distribute can generate considerable wealth for those who can take large shares of it for their own. In several cases armed groups have gathered aid to sell it on the market and buy new weapons.

## Grievance maps

Translating grievances geographically into physical targets is without any doubt the most difficult conceptual exercise of the geographic method. Grievances arise from a certain need or injustice which is always formulated in a narrative. As a first step, we will study the existing narratives of each warring party and summarize them in a written text

Summarizing the narratives of a warring party

Identity group x:

- Which injustice(s) do they denounce?
- What are their needs? (Cfr. Azar)
- Which changes do they want?
- What do they want to achieve? (Cfr. Gurr)

Let us take the Serbs (in 1992) as an example:

Short and simplified, the Serb narrative that constituted their grievances during the Balkan wars could be summarized as follows: *The Serbs have been a victim throughout history, always having been denied what is rightfully theirs. After a break-up, the Serbian 'people' will end up in three different countries. In such a situation the Serbs will be oppressed (and worse) by Fascist Croats and Muslim Bosniaks. Moreover, they will lose a part of the territory to which they are historically tied.* Analysing this narrative we can conclude that they need their security restored and their Serb identity safeguarded. Therefore they want to unite all Serbs in one undivided territory that corresponds with the borders of the 'historical Great Serbia'.

In a second step these needs, changes and goals need to be converted into physical targets on a map. This is a logical exercise. Returning to our example of the Serbs during the Balkan wars of 92-95: If the Serbs want to unite all their fellow-Serbs, we need a map with the ethnic division in the region. If the Serbs want to carve out a greater Serbia from the Yugoslav territory, we need a map with the border lines of this territorial idea. If the Serbs feel as if they are historically/culturally tied to certain areas, we need a map indicating these areas