Transnational cascades

This chapter is about why it matters to understand the cascade concept. By thinking counterfactually about cascades of violence, we can better understand how the great conflicts of the twentieth century—World War I, World War II and cascades of civil wars that were Cold War proxy contests—might have been prevented. It starts by considering geopolitically prominent wars that continue today in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). We consider whether these were and are preventable when confronted with the historical imagination of the cascades of violence framework. For all these geopolitically central conflicts, we ask if there were diplomatic paths not taken that might have interrupted cascade dynamics.

The ambition of this chapter is to help readers see conflicts that are familiar to them through a new lens. The hope is that looking at major wars through the cascade lens will help readers see them anew from an angle that invites preventability. We do not claim that the cascade lens is the best one for getting the most useful view of violence, and certainly not the only one. Even though our cascade account in the next chapter sets itself against critical characteristics of realist international relations (IR) theory, we still think there are valuable things we can learn from complementing a view of violence through a cascade lens with the different view of a realist lens. Likewise, we see value in multifocal viewing through the lenses of many other IR theories (Morgan 1997): neorealist, complex independence, Marxist, constructivist, postcolonial, dependency, feminist, green and even neoliberal, of which we have been frequently so critical in past writing. Readers will see us pick up some of these lenses quite
often throughout this book to move from a unifocal view to a bifocal to a multifocal cascade lens on violence. We are interested in the proposition that adding the cascade lens helps us to see violence more clearly. Because we end up in the final chapter with a complexity theory account of how to make good use of the cascade lens, the question of whether the cascade lens is the best possible lens does not interest us.

Why the cascade idea matters: Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Congo

Thinking counterfactually

To help understand cascade dynamics, in this book, we consider qualitative and quantitative analyses of what happens when cascade conditions are present versus what happens when they are absent. Two key questions frame the usefulness of this approach. First, if we think counterfactually, does this advance our knowledge about causal understanding of political events? Second, could we distinguish plausible, insightful arguments from implausible and weak ones?1 In different ways, counterfactual thinking (Climo and Howells 1976; Fearon 1991; Ferguson 2011; Lewis 1973; Stalnaker 1968; Weber 1949) helps us see the relevance of cascades.

Counterfactual analysis asks diagnostic questions such as whether a war would have occurred in the absence of a proximate cause that seemed to start it.2 Logically, this is as reputable as the counterfactual inference of a judge deciding whether, in the absence of a bullet that entered a heart, a death would not have occurred. Investigation of contextual data about things that did happen may be required, such as the victim’s death from a heart attack before the bullet arrived. Diplomats are more comfortable

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1 For a detailed analysis, see Tetlock and Belkin’s (1996) *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics*. The weakness of a counterfactual approach is that it does not deal with reality. It imagines a case where the presumed explanation is absent. One strength, however, with counterfactual analysis is that everything else that is relevant is identical. No amount of matching or controlling for third variables can guarantee that everything else is appropriately identical with the alternative of comparisons of real cases with and without the explanatory variable. Another strength is that counterfactual research can expand our policy imagination beyond roads that have actually been taken.

2 Moreover, Fearon (1991: 195) argues—rightly, we think—that ‘counterfactuals cannot be avoided in non-experimental hypothesis testing’. Hence, it is best that in the study of the onset of wars we take counterfactual thinking seriously and do it well.
analysing events that actually happened; yet, as a logical matter, when they do this they tend to be as counterfactual as the reasoning of the judge (Fearon 1991).

Contemplate this counterfactual. Would the world be a less dangerous place had the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) not invaded Afghanistan as a response to the attacks on the United States of 11 September 2001? What if a more minimalist form of violence had been launched instead? An example would have been a Special Forces attack on Osama bin Laden and his inner circle in September 2001 instead of planning an invasion for October. Before the NATO invasion, US intelligence knew exactly where bin Laden was much of the time (Weiner 2008: 473). After Kabul and Kandahar came under attack, it did not, and it did not get another chance at a Special Forces assault on a confirmed location until the US Navy SEALs killed bin Laden in May 2011.

A similar counterfactual is whether the world would be a less violent place had US president Bill Clinton launched such a Special Forces assault before 9/11 as a response to the 1998 suicide attacks on US embassies in Africa. The day before the 9/11 attacks, Clinton revealed in a speech to a private audience recorded by an Australian politician that he did have the intelligence on bin Laden’s location. He could have ordered his assassination, but was worried about American and Afghan casualties: ‘I could have killed him, but I would have had to destroy a little town called Kandahar in Afghanistan and kill 300 innocent women and children,’ Clinton said. ‘And then I would have been no better than him’ (Clinton 2014). The methodological strength of this counterfactual is that the surrounding data (Clinton’s recorded briefing) lend plausibility to the counterfactual as a path that tenably could have happened and could have made a difference.

Nils Christie (2010) has proposed a more radical counterfactual. It involves a restorative justice response to 9/11. His suggestion to the leadership of the Norwegian Nobel Prize Committee was to send ‘victims rather than bombs’ to Afghanistan. Its methodological strength was not that it could have been easily executed, but the way it opens our policy imagination to a road not taken—one radically different to the options that were considered.
Immediately after 9/11, Taliban leader Mullah Omar was instructed by a jirga (council) of Afghanistan’s leading religious scholars to offer to hand bin Laden over to a third Muslim country that might try him according to Sharia law. Leaders of two of Pakistan’s Islamic parties claim they negotiated bin Laden’s extradition to Pakistan, where he would be held in Peshawar and face an international tribunal that would decide whether to try him or hand him over to the United States. They claimed that both bin Laden and Mullah Omar had agreed to the extradition (Pilger 2002: 103; see also Gunaratna 2002: 227). Others say Mullah Omar only ever agreed to the proposition that bin Laden should be prosecuted (Gopal 2014: Ch. 1). Saudi Arabia was approached to explore prosecution there, as bin Laden was a Saudi citizen. Saudi Arabia had previously asked for bin Laden to be extradited to his homeland to be tried for the African embassy bombings of 1998. Former Pakistani foreign secretary Riaz Mohammad Khan (2011: 326) is convinced that, in the late 1990s, ‘Osama could have been extradited to Saudi Arabia with effective diplomacy’.3

Nils Christie’s restorative justice path not taken was for selected survivors and family representatives of victims of 9/11 to travel to Kabul to discuss the Taliban offer of independent Sharia justice for bin Laden—to put to the jirga their sorrows, needs and perspectives of a crime alleged to have been perpetrated by the Saudi citizen who enjoyed Taliban protection. One hope of such a restorative encounter—sitting in the circle of the jirga with the religious scholars—was a meeting of minds on how a worst possible outcome for both sides would be another war. The circle would inevitably have discussed that such a war would ravage again the longsuffering people of Afghanistan and could be ‘another Vietnam’ for the young American soldiers who would lose their lives, their

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3 After 9/11, however, Saudi Arabia spurned the extradition option partly because its ally, President Bush, was firm in conceiving the Taliban as an accomplice to the attack on the United States because it had provided a safe haven for bin Laden. Hence, another road not taken was for Bush to have pressured the Saudi leadership to push for extradition. Bush’s moral universe of the time was that all nations must declare themselves ‘for us’ or they would be ‘against us’. Bush was immovable in believing that, through its actions, the Taliban had already declared itself ‘against us’. The US argument that an invasion of Afghanistan was a legal war of self-defence depended on the claim that Afghanistan not only harboured bin Laden, but also refused to hand him over (Byers 2005: 65). Evidence was and still is missing that the Afghan Government knew of the plans to attack the United States and was determined not to surrender bin Laden after these plans were executed. What was needed was a face-saving diplomacy for the Taliban, who were responding to US demands to ‘give up bin Laden’ with pleas to ‘give us some evidence of guilt so we can justify handing bin Laden over’, which Bush dismissed with ‘we already know he is guilty’ (Griffin 2010). The war was undoubtedly illegal in any case: in the law of war, harbouring a terrorist and failing to prevent a terrorist attack on another country do not mean a state is an aggressor against the state targeted by the terrorism (White 2014: 41).
legs or their marriages. It was brought home to John Braithwaite that repeating the errors of Vietnam was a fear among victims’ families; he was living and teaching in southern Manhattan on 9/11, saw the first plane swoosh down Fifth Avenue and was standing in the street watching as the second smashed into the World Trade Centre. He attended candlelight vigils for peace with those families. There was quite a bit of support in New York for averting a military response until all the media proprietors rallied around the war president. Braithwaite gave talks in September and October 2001 at New York University, Harvard University and elsewhere in the United States, where some members of the audience certainly insisted on the imperative for a deterrent response when he argued against a rush to the invasion of Afghanistan.4

The counterfactual analyst can agree that it would have been politically difficult to prevail against that will to deterrence once President Bush had met with the major media proprietors and asked them to prepare the people of America for war. They did so by making news broadcasts surprisingly partisan for a free press, adorning bulletins with the national flag, the airwaves constantly tremoring with the national anthem, touting the stars and stripes and banning dissenting voices such as Noam Chomsky from major networks in a way that never happened during the Vietnam War. Even given the political untenability of the restorative alternative, the counterfactual analyst contends we learn for the future by asking if Americans would be better off today (with more legs, a lower suicide rate, a lower deficit) had they followed this road not taken. Was it worth a campaign that devastated Afghanistan again, that killed more NATO soldiers than the number of civilians killed on 9/11 and a greater number of NATO-country suicides (Fazal 2014) and that left NATO countries less fiscally capable of recovery from the Global Financial Crisis?

Reversing cascades back to Iraq, 1990

The counterfactual thinker wants to push back further through the cascades of violence. For instance, were the current messy wars in Iraq inevitable or a result of unwise Western diplomacy? The counterfactual diagnostician of cascades rewinds the tape to a meeting between the US Ambassador to Iraq and Iraqi president Saddam Hussein on 25 July 1990.

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4 These were updated as a written paper in 2002 for the British Criminology Conference and, also in 2002, for the Australian Member Committee of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific, which were subsequently published as Braithwaite (2005).
Saddam left that meeting thinking that if he invaded Kuwait, the United States would only bluster. Saddam saw US interests as wanting an Iraq that balanced Iran rather than a Shia-dominated successor that would support Iran. Resonating with our Proposition 10, Saddam also said to the US ambassador: ‘Yours is a society which cannot accept 10,000 dead in one battle’ (Byman and Waxman 2002: 143). Saddam expected President Bush to indulge some ritualistic international condemnation, but he thought the United States would not do anything to stop him, just as it did not stop its ally Indonesia from invading East Timor. Iraqi politics professor Saad Jawad, currently affiliated with the London School of Economics, argued in email correspondence with us, as did a former Iranian ambassador (Interview in Tehran, 2016, No. 051611), that this was a clever trap rather than diplomatic incompetence. This was because Israel was concerned to ‘do something’ about the massive military capacity Saddam had at that time; the United States and the United Kingdom were keen for Israel not to do anything rash and so assured Israel that they would take care of the problem. Whether through deceit or incompetence, the road not taken here was for the US ambassador to have signalled unequivocally what the United States was ultimately prepared to do: invade Iraq to reverse Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. Of course, it would also have been imperative to say that the United States would prefer to reverse the invasion through diplomacy and/or the progressive escalation of sanctions until Iraq pulled out, but it would do whatever it took. From the perspective of preventing cascades of violence, it was awful diplomacy to allow Saddam to believe that the United States would not do whatever it took when it was prepared to invade if necessary.

Before invading, the United States also might have given Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev more time after the occupation of Kuwait to persuade Saddam that, unless he withdrew, he would suffer a terrible defeat. Gorbachev (1998: 59–60) said:

5 Another senior Iranian interviewee from the High Security Council said there was no evidence available to them, however, that there was any US trap for Saddam in Kuwait (Interview in Tehran, 2016, No. 051604).
6 It is certainly clear that the United States was sufficiently committed to the objective of destroying the Iraqi army to commit a war crime to achieve it. We refer to the ‘turkey shoot’ in which, after Saddam complied with US terms for withdrawal from Kuwait, the US attacked the retreating column in open country. This is the international criminal law equivalent of a police officer shooting a criminal in the back after they have been told to put down their gun and walk away.
7 For a transcript and commentary on the feeble US signalling at this meeting, see Salinger and Laurent (1991: 47–62).
here was not enough time for the last effort. Of course, no one can assert confidently that it would have been fruitful. However, I still have a feeling that we rushed, that we missed something.

Gorbachev contrasted this rush with US president John F. Kennedy rejecting the counsel of his team and giving Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev ‘one more chance’ at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis.8

It was the basing of US forces in Saudi Arabia after Operation Desert Storm that so incensed Osama bin Laden. Bin Laden had been a US ally until then (against the Soviet-backed regime that still clung to power in Afghanistan in 1991). This persuaded bin Laden to turn to violent jihad against the American and Saudi regimes. Had the United States projected a firm resolve to Saddam in 1990 to escalate step-by-step to whatever level of sanction or military mobilisation was required to prevent his occupation of Kuwait, might 9/11—and therefore a war lasting 16 years so far in Afghanistan—have been prevented? Might the second Iraq invasion, in 2003, and everything that cascaded from it also have been prevented? Would a cascade of violent jihad across the Muslim world have been prevented?

Iraq, 2003

When George W. Bush’s cabinet decided to invade Iraq, it had a single-layered objective: regime change. The president’s single-layered thinking was on display under the ‘Mission Accomplished’ banner on the US aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln on 1 May 2003. The war had succeeded in removing Saddam from power. President Bush was not in the business of weighing that gain against lives that might be lost by cascading criminal violence on the anarchic streets of Iraq and by 14 further years of virtually continuous civil war (so far) among various armed factions in the new Iraq.

8 Returning to Iraq, Gorbachev said: ‘[W]e lacked not only time then, but probably imagination too … [With] a self-confident despot … compelling graphic demonstration would be helpful. In 1945 Albert Einstein, Leo Szilard and other physicists recommended to President Truman that he not bomb Japanese cities but demonstrate a nuclear explosion on an uninhabited island and invite Japanese leaders and representatives of other countries to observe. Quite probably, such a demonstration would have shown the Japanese the uselessness of further resistance and persuaded them to lay down their arms. However, Truman did not listen to the scientists’ advice, wishing to demonstrate US military might to the Soviet Union, which already at that time was beginning to be perceived not as an ally but as an enemy’ (Gorbachev 1998: 59–60).
Because cascade analysts see cascades layered within cascades, they like to ask counterfactual questions inside cascades, which are within wider cascades. Hence, we can ask did the second President Bush (George W.) err in diagnosing the costs and benefits of an invasion of Iraq in 2003 by calculating too simply in terms of the costs and benefits of regime change? It seems the Bush White House was single-layered in its analysis in this way (Woodward 2002, 2004). Was Bush’s focus too narrowly on estimates from his defence secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, that only a modest invasion force would be needed, that American losses from the invasion would be low? Did President Bush give enough weight to the costs of managing the descent of Iraq without a police force into an anomic world of looters, kidnappers and armed criminal gangs? Would Al-Qaeda (and later Islamic State) be attracted to fill this vacuum of social order with their particular kind of order? We explain in this book that the 2003 invasion of Iraq is not a rarity as an interstate war with low casualties that cascaded to massive casualties through internal violence from crime and civil war (see Hagan et al. 2015). Survey research suggests between 150,000 and 600,000 deaths in Iraq due to conflict in the first three years after the invasion (Green and Ward 2009b: 610). The Brookings Institution estimates that the 3,000–4,000 deaths a month during this period had fallen after the ‘surge’ to 500 a month two years later (O’Hanlon and Campbell 2008: 4).
The 1990 war in Iraq cascaded to other problems, including the slaughter of Kurds in the north of the country and Shia in the south, who had been urged by the United States to rise against Saddam. An Iraqi nuclear weapons program that had in fact been dismantled by diplomacy, sanctions and UN weapons inspection became an excuse for cascading to another invasion by the United States and its allies in 2003, led by George H. W. Bush’s son, President George W. Bush. The war has also seen gendered and sexed power relations that pervade domination by state security sectors in times of war. Saddam’s former torture and execution chambers were taken over by the US military forces. Abu Ghraib prison became a torture zone, where abuse and sexual humiliation of the Iraqi detainees by American military personnel and private contractors were justified and sanctioned by the broader US foreign policy objective. Green and Ward (2009a, 2009b) also note a sharp increase in honour killings in Kurdistan and beyond as a result of the war, widespread murder of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) people and sexual abuse of children by the Badr and Mahdi militias, among others.

We used to have a government that was almost secular: It had one dictator. Now we have almost 60 dictators—Islamists who think of women as forces of evil. This is what is called the democratization of Iraq. (Yannar Mohamed, quoted in Green and Ward 2009b: 622)

The biographies of the key players in the US decision to invade Iraq in 2003 reveal that they did not consider a cascades analysis of what would happen. In his book, Rumsfeld (2011) argued that the actions in Abu Ghraib were isolated incidents caused by some ‘rotten apples’. Western generals were ignored, especially by Rumsfeld, when they warned that an invasion that was not resourced with a follow-through civil policing strategy would see Iraq descend into anarchy. In the event, the number killed on all sides in the war was tiny in comparison with those killed by the kidnapping, murders, bombings and internecine fighting of armed criminal gangs in the years after the war. Far fewer of the unparalleled endowment of antiquities at the juncture of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers were lost to smart bombs than to the pillage of looters in the days after the invasion; looting of antiquities continues as an important funding source for Islamic State at the same time as destruction of antiquities is part of its symbolic politics (Caulderwood 2014).
President George W. Bush did not weigh the possibility that the invasion would actually accelerate terrorism around the world. Saddam had been a staunch opponent of Islamists and specifically of Al-Qaeda. The
‘humiliation’ of the first Gulf War at the hands of the senior Bush had already had the effect of motivating the Al-Qaeda network. The second Gulf War hugely motivated second-generation recruitment to multitudinous terror networks.9 Islamic State’s third Gulf War has energised a renewed surge of recruitment to terror and a cascade from Iraq to Syria. More broadly, the first Gulf War not only cascaded to the second, both wars also cascaded to multiple forms of violence that were worse than the violence of the two short invasions. As Amin Saikal (2014: 152) put it:

Paradoxically, the war succeeded in creating what it claimed it would destroy. Before the war, as was argued correctly by opponents of the US invasion, Iraq was not a theatre for operations by Al-Qaeda and its sympathisers. It was the United States and its allies, through the mismanagement of the post-invasion Iraqi crisis, that managed to create the right conditions for such a development.

The previous evidence from quantitative political science renders unsurprising the outcome in Iraq and Afghanistan to date. Hegre et al. (2001: 38–9) showed in the American Political Science Review (before the NATO adventurism of Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya) that regime change that shifts from ‘an old autocracy to a new semidemocracy … increases the risk of civil war almost nine times’. If the regime change shifts the state to full democracy, the risk of civil war is only slightly elevated in the first year or two after the change; thereafter the risk is lowered. When statebuilding projects in former autocracies such as Iraq, Afghanistan or Libya turn them into semidemocracies, statebuilders might take satisfaction in their work. No one expects societies with such authoritarian histories to turn into full democracies within a decade or two. In fact, when a regime change is militarily coerced, rapid transition to full democracy almost never happens. Chenoweth and Stephan’s (2011) study of 323 cases since 1900 shows that change through peaceful people power is the modality of regime change that delivers the best statistical prospects of transition to full democracy. Enduring democracy is an organic creation from within, often starting from the bottom up in smallish towns and cities; rarely in history does it emerge from the top down in states that are coerced to adopt it.

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9 Hagan et al. (2015: 187–8) conclude from their empirical study that coalition violence cascaded in this way: ‘[T]he roots of the Arab Sunni insurgency were the perceived and reported unnecessary attacks by US/coalition forces on civilians that increased cynicism about the role of these forces in Iraq, and that in turn mediated and intensified the widespread acceptance of attacks on these forces that were the hallmarks of the Arab Sunni insurgency … [They were] understood as collective punishment of the Arab Sunnis as the defeated group in the Iraq War.’
Cascading back to Afghanistan and Pakistan

Just as George W. Bush’s second Iraq war was a result of a failure of preventive diplomacy before George H. W. Bush’s first Iraq war, so we argue that George W. Bush’s 2001 Afghanistan war was a result of failures of preventive diplomacy by George H. W. Bush in Afghanistan at the end of the 1980s. The campaign—initiated during Jimmy Carter’s presidency—of supporting mujahidin, including Osama bin Laden, to fight the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan made a significant contribution to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Soviet premier Yuri Andropov said publicly that were it not for the imperative to concentrate on winning the war in Afghanistan, he would have crushed the Solidarity movement in Poland militarily, as the Soviets had previously done successfully in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968). During George H. W. Bush’s presidency, in 1988–89, the mujahidin’s campaign led to a humiliating withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.

Then there was the prospect of this globalising jihad cascading to the destabilisation of Pakistan and to a threat of nuclear terrorism there by the Pakistani Taliban (see Chapters 5 and 6). The safe haven for terrorism in Afghanistan, which the West had been fighting to eliminate since 2001, was replaced with one in Pakistan that became the world headquarters for Al-Qaeda. A renewed Afghan Taliban insurgency was launched from Pakistan that persists, stronger than ever, at the time of writing. Renewal of the formerly defeated Taliban might one day see it return to share power or even take it as the West wearies of fighting them.

After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, a successor post-communist regime of former communists assumed power. They were no angels but were no worse than some of the ex-communists who came to power in Eastern Europe and Central Asia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The country’s leader, Dr Mohammad Najibullah, was, in particular, no angel. He had been head of the secret police of the former communist regime. Nevertheless, he was committed to transition from communism to social democracy and he acknowledged that he would not be an acceptable leader of Afghanistan for the mujahidin. During the four years he retained power (until April 1992) after the Soviet withdrawal, he wanted to initiate a reconciliation process that would see a transition to powersharing with the various mujahidin groups who continued to fight the Afghan Government. Diplomatically, this seemed a realistic approach because Pakistan’s president, Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, had called for
a reconciliation government in 1987, a year before the Soviets started to withdraw, and, in 1988, he offered his public support for Soviet troops to oversee transition to a reconciliation government to avert bloodshed (Khan 2011: 6). Gorbachev had been attracted to this since 1986, but wanted a speedy withdrawal timeline and could not agree on the details with Pakistan. Najibullah also appealed to the United States to help provide a transition for his country to become ‘a bulwark against the spread of fundamentalism’ (Gargun 1992). Various mujahidin groups, which did not include the Taliban at that time, were determined to keep fighting until their group prevailed over others.

The mujahidin destroyed the country by fighting each other for the spoils of power until the Taliban pushed through the ruck to enforce order. The Bush administration was triumphalist about the mujahidin victory over the Soviets. With Soviet withdrawal, they had achieved their single-level objective of defeating the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. It had been achieved at considerable financial cost. The Bush administration wanted to cut those costs—false economy for the long-term financial interests of the United States. So America walked away from Afghanistan in 1989, effectively outsourcing Afghan diplomacy to Pakistan, which proved a well-funded but unfaithful agent of US interests. The Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency played a lead role in putting in power a radical Islamist Taliban that it hoped would be an ISI client.

According to a counterfactual cascades analysis, George H. W. Bush might have done better by Afghanistan and by US interests by putting US diplomatic weight and financial support directly behind the kind of transition from communism that it had supported in many post-communist countries, with former communist leaders little better than those in Afghanistan. Obviously, this would have meant taking up Dr Najibullah’s offer to be a transitional leader who would step aside for a new powersharing government with the ultimate goal of a further transition to future governments elected by the people, as happened in other post-communist societies.

Gorbachev would have found this a much more attractive transition than the ongoing war that was bound to be won in a few years by the mujahidin once the Soviets had pulled out. For Najibullah, it would have been a more attractive outcome than what eventually happened to him: he was castrated and hanged from a post. For the mujahidin, it would also have been a win because they would have inherited in Kabul a city that
was not in ruins. It could have been win–win–win–win for the parties. George H. W. Bush’s administration lacked the vision for a preventive diplomacy that joined forces with its allies and with Gorbachev to impose a ceasefire. That ceasefire might have been followed by a transition to democracy and Western development assistance at a level similar to that provided to post-communist regimes in Europe. Much tragedy might then have been prevented. Gorbachev still had huge leverage through the formidable funds he continued to provide Najibullah, especially to his military effort to hold off the mujahidin. The tragedy that joint Bush–Gorbachev diplomacy might have prevented included the rise of the Taliban, 9/11 and 28 further years so far of terrible warfare in Afghanistan. We see below that the same tragedy of a missed opportunity for joint Bush–Gorbachev preventive diplomacy occurred in Yugoslavia.

Plate 2.3 Women’s rally, communist Afghanistan, 1980.
Source: Originally published in a photobook about Afghanistan by the Communist Government Planning Ministry. Unknown photographer.
The international intervention in Afghanistan has also been a gendered process (D’Costa 2016). US first lady Laura Bush, in a November 2001 radio address from the White House, noted that ‘the fight against terrorism is also a fight for rights and dignity of women’ (Bush 2001). The West touts the considerable advances achieved for women in Afghanistan since 2001—for example, in education for girls—as an accomplishment of its war there. While there has been some progress for women and girls since 2001, it has been much less than the former Afghan communist regime made in that area. By 2014, Afghanistan was still ranked only 101 of 102 countries on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Centre’s Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI 2016). The preventive diplomacy road not taken for women and girls was to avert the catastrophic damage the Taliban takeover did to women’s rights. There was broader culpability for this failure of transition: ‘the donor community and the United Nations, which for a long time had been attentive to Afghanistan, held back, literally writing off Afghanistan as a failed state beyond redemption’ (Khan 2011: 326).

Democratic Republic of Congo, 1996

As low as the initial invasion costs were to change the Taliban and Iraqi regimes in 2001 and 2003, and as high as the cascade costs were of regional destabilisation, suicide bombings, civil war and kidnappings in comparison, Afghanistan and Iraq–Syria are not the most extreme cases of this phenomenon. The invasion of Zaire that Rwanda and Uganda led in 1996 with other states, and with internal support from opponents of the regime of president Sese Seko Mobutu, effected regime change quickly, with probably fewer than 4,000 battle deaths. But the successful regime change cascaded into civil war and other forms of regional armed violence that continue today. There is no doubt that exaggerated estimates exist in the literature for the numbers killed in the DRC since 1993 (see Goldstein 2011), as is also true for Iraq and Afghanistan in this period, but it does seem likely that the DRC’s many conflicts have been more deadly and diffused across more countries. War also cascaded to an escalating incidence of rape, estimated from a large national survey published in the *American Journal of Public Health* (Peterman et al. 2011) to have afflicted 430,000 women aged 15–49 in one year (2007), increasing to higher
levels in the next few years. Some of this was mass rape associated with war; much of it was common criminal rape that we now know also escalates as a result of war. Commentators have used official statistics to argue that rape is not as bad compared, for example, with levels in the United States (e.g. Goldstein 2011: Ch. 10). Our fieldwork suggests such commentary fails to take account of an under-reporting of rape in the DRC that bears no comparison with a country such as the United States; the worst rape occurs in districts beyond the reach of state officials who record crime. While war deaths in the DRC have been overcounted, rape, genocide, state crime and many other crimes have been undercounted compared with surrounding African countries because of the sheer inscrutability of remote parts of Congo that were the cockpit of many regional wars.

As with its opposition to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, France was the major power that most strongly opposed tacit US support for Rwanda and Uganda’s invasion to depose Mobutu (Dunn 2002: 59; Reyntjens 2009). France’s view was that, while Mobutu was a corrupt tyrant of the worst kind, his removal would stir local civil wars that were already simmering. Few listened to France, whose African diplomacy was in bad odour after the deplorable role it played in the Rwandan genocide. But France was right in this instance; it would have been better to wait for the ageing, sickly Mobutu to die and then be replaced through an intensive campaign of diplomatic, Catholic Church and civil society support for constitutional renewal and democratic succession. There was also a plan to prevent the war—a plan that was supported by African leaders such as Nelson Mandela at a Nairobi summit. The plan was backed by UN Security Council Resolution 1078 of 9 November 1996. It involved moving refugee camps, which were threatening Rwanda, a long distance away from the Rwandan border and positioning UN peacekeepers between these new camps and the Rwandan army. According to Reyntjens (2009: 82–3), the United States and Canada (which had offered to command the multinational force), gamed this plan by pretending to support it and promising to supply peacekeepers. The United States and Canada then insisted that peacekeepers could only be deployed on condition that they not be mandated to separate and disarm combatants! This was precisely

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10 We also know that there are massive levels of rape in the DRC of girls under 15 and women over 49 and a rate of male rape that is sometimes found to be as high as one-third of the female rape rate. Humiliation of men—for example, by anal rape with the barrel of a rifle to signify their subjugation—is not only about degradation with similarities to the suffering of female rape victims, but also, in a similar way, a strategy of war to destroy enemies.
what the African Union, the European Union and non-governmental organisation (NGO) and UN players had correctly diagnosed as necessary to prevent war. When the crunch came, the United States tacitly supported a Rwandan invasion that was a clear violation of international law.

Plate 2.4 Rwandan Hutus in the Goma refugee camp, eastern Zaire (now DRC), 1994.
Source: Mikkel Ostergaard/Panos.

The error was the same with president Bush’s 2003 diplomacy in invading Iraq and with president Clinton’s diplomacy in deciding to allow, indeed encourage—through the actions of the Pentagon and US intelligence agencies—its ally/client Rwanda to lead the invasion of the DRC in 1996 (Dunn 2002: 58–9; Reyntjens 2009: 57–79). It was the error of a single-level analysis of regime change rather than a cascade analysis. With Iraq, that single-level analysis was: ‘What will be the costs and benefits of an invasion to replace Saddam with our new client?’ With the DRC, it was: ‘What will be the costs and benefits of an invasion to replace Mobutu with a new client of our client (Rwanda)?’ Both US presidents failed to factor beyond the likelihood of a militarily decisive and low-cost initial invasion. Their advisors failed to fully factor in what might be the terrible cascades that the initial military conquest could unleash.
Libya, 2011

Another US administration, this time Barack Obama’s, made the same analytic error in 2011 in Libya. Today, inside Libya itself, the turn of events has been much worse than even African Union leaders feared. Violent jihadist groups affiliated with Islamic State came to control large swathes of Libya and possess massive firepower, including very large numbers of sophisticated missiles capable of shooting down aircraft—civilian or military—anywhere the missiles are deployed around the world.

Libya was no easy foreign policy dilemma after the nonviolent Arab Spring uprising was hijacked into a civil war by a combination of rebellious elements of president Muammar Gaddafi’s armed forces, tribal militias turning against Gaddafi and regional provocateurs from the Arab world pouring arms into the hands of their favoured dissidents. We do not criticise the decision of the United States and the UN Security Council to support NATO airstrikes against the massive armoured column heading towards Benghazi to put down the uprising there on 19 March 2011. Even though prior and subsequent events showed that when Gaddafi did reconquer cities, he did not engage in mass civilian slaughter, ‘the responsibility to protect’ made it hard to ignore an unstable leader with Gaddafi’s murderous past when he warned that he would teach the dissidents in Benghazi a lesson. After NATO aircraft had decimated that column and turned it back, however, the West did not seriously explore options other than ramming home the considerable military advantage the annihilation of that column had delivered, pushing on to crush the regime through a revolution that ended with the rape and murder of Gaddafi himself.

African Union leaders claimed in Peacebuilding Compared interviews in 2012 and 2013 that they already had Gaddafi in a position where he was agreeing to stand aside in a negotiated transition. In 2015, we learnt from leaked recordings of Pentagon negotiations with Saif Gaddafi and other Libyan leaders that US Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Mike Mullen, were opposed to a war of regime change. We also learnt that there was no US intelligence indicating a risk of mass atrocity against civilians (see also Puri 2016). Until Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who was determined to achieve regime change, shut down all Pentagon communication with Gaddafi, the emerging Pentagon consensus was to accept Gaddafi’s proposal, which was:
The Libyans would stop all combat operations and withdraw all military forces to the outskirts of the cities and assume a defensive posture. Then to insure the credibility with the international community, the Libyans would accept recipients from the African Union to make sure the truce was honored,’ Mr. Kubic [retired Rear Admiral Charles Kubic] said, describing the offers. ‘[Gaddafi] came back and said he was willing to step down and permit a transition government, but he had two conditions,’ Mr. Kubic said. ‘First was to insure there was a military force left over after he left Libya capable to go after al Qaeda. Secondly, he wanted to have the sanctions against him and his family and those loyal to him lifted and free passage. At that point in time, everybody thought that was reasonable.’

(Shapiro and Riddell 2015)

According to Alex de Waal (2013: 379), the African Union roadmap could have stabilised a peaceful democratic transition had it been given a chance by Western and African spoilers and the International Criminal Court (ICC), which acted as a spoiler by announcing an intent to prosecute Gaddafi just as the African leaders were negotiating his exit (Bartu 2014: 2). From a cascades of violence perspective, the advantage of the preferred African Union resolution was that it would have kept Libyan state structures, including security sector structures, in tact for transition to a new democratic leadership (Proposition 4). The cascade analysis of African Union diplomats and senior presidents, such as those of South Africa and Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville), was fear of the formidable Libyan security sector disintegrating and the sundry transnational armed groups under its wing fleeing south to destabilise countries beyond Libya. As Alex de Waal (2013: 369–70) put it, Africans saw the militarisation of the Arab Spring in Libya as ‘threatening a lawless mercenarism that could easily spill across borders’. De Waal (2013: 369–70) quoted Chad’s president, Idriss Déby Itno: ‘beware of opening the Libyan Pandora’s Box.’

NATO leaders rejected this cascade analysis in favour of a clear and simple regime change narrative. Sadly, the African leaders’ fears were realised. Mercenaries from Chad, Mali, Niger and Nigeria, after acquiring new skill sets fighting for Gaddafi, abandoned him as the military tide turned and fled south. As African Union leaders had explicitly warned NATO would happen, these fighters carried large parts of Gaddafi’s massive arsenal with them. This included advanced weapon systems and surface-
to-air missiles.11 Few countries in the world had a quality and quantity of military hardware superior to Libya. At one point, according to official intelligence interviews, Libya had more Mirage jets than the French air force. Small, battle-hardened armies in possession of an arms bazaar connected up with other dissident military organisations either to seize control of thinly defended regions (prompting civil war) or to dominate smaller districts militarily to extort, loot and push protection rackets. This cascade of former Libyan fighters afflicted Mali, Chad, Niger, northern Nigeria and the Central African Republic. This cascaded to Islamist group Boko Haram coopting most of the chaos that was started by insurgents not affiliated with Islamic State and to civil war in Cameroon as well. It was more destabilising for some of these countries—such as Mali, whose government fell as a result in March 2012—than for others. The Mali civil war even managed to bring ethnic Tuareg troops who had been fighting with Gaddafi together on the same side with jihadists who had fought against him (Rifkind 2013: 18). By 2015, UN reports had documented numerous sightings of Libyan ammunition much further afield in Africa than these countries immediately to Libya’s south. Marsh (2017) concluded that most of the cascade of Libyan arms occurred in 2012 and 2013 and was greatly reduced in the years since.

From a Western perspective, Libya had oil and Gaddafi’s regime was geopolitically significant. From an African viewpoint, Libya was a small country of 6 million people, while Niger, Cameroon, Mali and Chad were much larger countries, of 19 million, 24 million, 18 million and 14 million people, respectively. Nigeria had a population of 182 million and, between 2013 and 2014, it experienced the sharpest increase in terrorism deaths ever recorded. The most deadly terrorist group in the world, according to the 2015 University of Maryland Global Terrorism Index, was not Islamic State, but Boko Haram, headquartered in northern Nigeria, which accounted for half of the 20 most deadly terrorist attacks

11 According to the distinguished investigative journalist Seymour Hersh, who was responsible for breaking the story of the My Lai massacre during the Vietnam War and the Abu Ghraib prison torture scandal during the Iraq War, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) also ran a ‘rat line’ via Turkey out of the US Consulate in Benghazi to divert arms captured by the factions they supported in Benghazi. Those weapons went to the armed opposition to the Assad regime in Syria (Cockburn 2014). While these weapons initially went to armed groups supported by the West, ultimately, a large proportion of these groups’ weapons fell into the hands of Islamic State and Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups that overwhelmed them. Some were quite likely transferred directly by the Americans to these groups when they pretended to be US allies. The Hersh story was based on what had been a highly classified and secret annex to the report of the US Senate Intelligence Committee on the attacks by jihadists on the US Consulate in Benghazi in which US ambassador Christopher Stevens was killed.
in 2014. Many credible sources such as UN Security Council reports, *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian* and *Al Jazeera* now confirm that Boko Haram received significant weaponry from the collapse of Libyan armories. In 2015, the group almost certainly reversed the cascade by sending (modest) numbers of troops to fight for an Islamic State takeover of Libya—the ‘gateway to Rome’, as their propaganda put it (Barsocchini 2015; Gutteridge 2015). The African states were therefore livid with NATO that its adventurism had cascaded into their backyard and into a complex of issues much bigger than a containable Libyan transition.

Another accomplishment Africa wanted to defend was one that it shared with South America: the distinction of being a continent where nuclear weapons had begun to spread, but where non-proliferation politics had succeeded in restoring the nuclear-free status of their continents. This is a crucial accomplishment for Africa as the most conflict-riven continent in recent times. It was secured by persuading Gaddafi, with enormous help from European and American diplomacy, to dismantle not only the nuclear program he had been developing in collaboration with Pakistan, Iran, Syria and North Korea, but also most of his chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program. There is dispute, however, whether this had gone as far as those negotiating with Libya believed. In the eyes of its advocates, this package was to be associated with the rising influence of the more liberal and peaceable Saif Gaddafi, albeit with significant pushback by Libyan hardliners, and the strong expectation that Saif would soon succeed his father as head of state. The Gaddafi family was in genuine fear of the rise of Al-Qaeda–affiliated groups and had been ruthlessly effective in suppressing them.

Finally, the rapprochement of Gaddafi with his former enemies had long since resulted in him relinquishing his role as the world’s most diversified funder of anti-Western terrorism, from Indonesia to the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in Northern Ireland and right across Africa and the Arab world. Gaddafi and his son Saif had become what we call in Chapter 3 ‘model modernisers’, who ‘rethought what it meant to be a successful country’ (Rublee 2009: 158). Gaddafi observed how insurgents he had supported with weapons and money—such as Nelson Mandela, Gerry Adams and Yasser Arafat—were getting results by engaging diplomatically with the West. It was on the nuclear weapons front that all these diplomatic accomplishments began to unravel. This
was disappointing to African strategic thinkers and some Western ones. As Richard Haass (2014: 1) put it, the abrogation of this preventive diplomacy in favour of regime change:

coming as it did a few years after Qaddafi had been induced to give up his unconventional weapons programs—probably increased the perceived value of nuclear weapons and reduced the likelihood of getting other states to follow Qaddafi’s example.

In other words, rogue regimes will have learnt the lesson from Libya that no matter how outrageously we (rogue regimes) flout the international rules of the game, Western regime-changers will not dare move against us while we have WMD. It is an ironclad law of international relations that no matter how big the crimes of a state with nuclear weapons, the ICC will never indict its leadership. The West only pushes for regime change and ICC indictments of leaders of pariah states such as Libya and Iraq after they have abandoned their WMD programs. Therefore, if we want to be a state that stands relentlessly against the West, against the UN Security Council or for the caliphate, we must take a page out of Israel’s playbook, acquire a credible WMD program and never succumb to diplomatic pressure to surrender it in the naive way of Gaddafi and Saddam.

North Korean generals say not only in private communications detected by Western intelligence but also in public speeches that no country with nuclear weapons has ever been invaded. We have not seen empirical evidence that leaders of rogue states do think this way, rather than just saying it. It is a speculative theory of impetus for the cascade of WMD, but surely a speculation about risk that must be weighed in the balance when considering whether the right path was taken in Libya’s violent regime change.

From the moment Gaddafi was killed, jihadist units began to parade openly under the Al-Qaeda flag in Libya’s largest cities. They operated large training camps to prepare fighters for deployment in the civil wars against Bashar al-Assad’s regime in Syria and against the US-backed regime in Iraq. During fieldwork interviews in Libya as long ago as December 2013, Islamist leaders told us that more than 1,000 Libyan fighters they had trained in Libya had already been killed fighting in Syria. Jihadist groups gained control of many oilfields. Libyan oil production has collapsed to very low levels for a number of years at the time of writing.
Violence escalated further when regional players—Qatar, Egypt and Sudan—pushed the cascade by providing military support to their preferred internal Libyan clients.

Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, from 2014

Part III of the book draws on the learnings from Chenoweth and Stephan’s (2011) analysis of 323 struggles for regime change (or other maximalist systemic change) between 1900 and 2006. Their data show that nonviolent struggles enjoy twice the success rate of armed struggles. Hence, Western backers of Arab Spring regime-changers might have argued more earnestly with them and their funders that eschewing violence was more likely to achieve long-run success with their objectives. Instead, the West moved rather quickly to arm them. Chenoweth and Stephan’s data suggest that nonviolence is also more likely to secure a regime change that ushers in sustainable democratic consolidation (as opposed to replacing one tyrant with another).

A problem with the Arab Spring has been that both the security/ intelligence apparatchiks of the ‘deep state’ in countries such as Egypt, Syria and Yemen (Filiu 2015) and violent Islamist groups, including those backed by Al-Qaeda and later Islamic State, learnt from the quick success of nonviolence in toppling undemocratic regimes by a mostly nonviolent democratic crowd. Similarly, Qatar learned that it could move in to back the Muslim Brotherhood, which was sometimes violent, sometimes not, sometimes democratic, sometimes not, across many states. ‘Deep states’ even secretly released from prison, armed and funded hardline Islamists in the hope of persuading the West to back their dictatorships (Filiu 2015). These groups had an interest in harnessing disorder to their violent projects (Proposition 7). Al-Qaeda cells in Iraq set out to provoke Shia communities to blame a nearby Sunni community and engage in retaliatory attacks. Al-Qaeda’s bombing of the Samarra mosque in Iraq, one of the holiest shrines of Shia Islam, was a prominent example of such an intentionally created cascade of violence (Kilcullen 2013: 139). The Arab Spring uprising in Syria began with a commitment to nonviolence as strong as anywhere in the region. Radical Islamist factions also joined the uprising against Assad, with an agenda of turning it into an armed struggle they sought to dominate. Qatar bears some responsibility for intervening early with a great deal of funding for arms for Assad’s opponents, thus cascading violence in ways not dissimilar to their contribution to turning
Libya from a nonviolent to a violent revolution. In both Libya and Syria, there were Arab businessmen and intelligence officials from Qatar, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states who were keen to fund groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda. Perhaps they were simply careless in funding many comers who were willing to fight Assad, as was the United States—which was therefore willing to turn a blind eye to such recklessness by its allies. The United States became wilfully blind to the arms Turkey and Gulf states provided to the most successful group fighting President Assad, the Al-Nusra Front, also known until July 2016 as Al-Qaeda in Syria and Al-Qaeda in the Levant. Turkey probably sees Al-Nusra as a group that has been willing to engage in savage fighting against Turkey’s enemy, the other effective fighting force against Assad (and Islamic State), the Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG). At some point, the United States started to train and arm the ‘moderate opposition’ to the tune of $500 million, with arms that ended up in the hands of the immoderate and trainees who could not be accounted for on the battlefield (Puri 2016: Ch. 2). The aim of some Gulf-funded spoilers from 2011 seems to have been to destabilise nonviolence and provoke the Syrian military into committing atrocities (Chakrabarti 2013; Jha 2012).

In the upshot, this cascaded to Al-Qaeda in Iraq moving into Syria with a success that crushed the democratic opposition to Assad and cascaded to the Islamic State conquest of much of Iraq and Syria in 2014 and 2015.

This, in turn, helped a cascade to civil war in Turkey. In interviews with Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) leaders, we asked why the peace agreement that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan signed with the PKK in 2013 disintegrated (Interviews in Iraq, No. 041754). They claimed that Erdoğan started to insist (from 2011 in fact, before the 2013 agreement) that the PKK not provide military support to the Syrian Kurds. Erdoğan’s attempts to enforce this were the beginning of the end of the Turkey–PKK peace agreement. By mid-2015, when the Turkish peace agreement collapsed, the PKK was mobilising huge support for the Syrian Kurd defence against Islamic State. Others point to additional factors, such as the PKK failing to demobilise sufficiently inside Turkey; failing to move all their fighters out to Iraq’s Kurdistan, as agreed in 2013; the rising electoral power of the Kurds inside Turkey, which Erdoğan saw as a threat after the new, predominantly Kurdish People’s Democratic Party won 80 seats in the July 2015 election, forcing Erdoğan to assemble a minority government for the first time since 2002; and vocal PKK opposition to Erdoğan’s acquisition of stronger presidential powers (Akyol 2015).
Mismanagement of the civil war in Turkey in turn helped the cascade to a military coup attempt and then to President Erdoğan succeeding in a referendum to overturn checks and balances against authoritarian rule of Turkey.

Towards a long-run geopolitics of cascade prevention

So what went wrong with the ‘civilising project’, as Elias (2000) saw it, from 1914? Does a cascades analysis have anything to offer in explaining how the extreme surges of violence during the past 103 years might have been prevented?

These years since 1914, we contend, have a more complex geopolitics of violence than the previous century. From 1914—in fact, from 1911—both cascades of violence and cascades of nonviolence grew. This is what makes it a methodologically strategic century for developing an inductive understanding of cascades of violence and nonviolence. The nature of the medium-term trends has become more uncertain than they were at the time of Pinker’s (2011) work. Battlefield deaths increased sharply from 1911 (the Libyan and Balkan wars) and did not begin to descend back towards nineteenth-century levels until the 1990s—although Syria, Iraq and many other smaller conflicts such as Yemen, Ukraine and renewed fighting in the DRC are driving battle deaths up again at the time of writing (Allansson et al. 2017). Violent deaths rose in a period when those who are shot and stabbed on battlefields and in domestic crimes benefit from stupendous progress in the speed with which medics get them to hospitals to save their lives. Improved ambulance services caused a sharp rise in the ratio of wounding and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) suicides to killings during the past century (Fazal 2014).

The next section moves from widening our lens beyond South Asia to a limited temporal widening. It positions the past century as unusually bloody (Ferguson 2006; Hobsbawm 1995) and as preceded by a much more peaceful century after the defeat of Napoleon (from 1812 to 1911). It was a post-Napoleonic century that can be conceived as a high-water mark of Norbert Elias’s (2000) ‘civilising process’—a century in which the lives lost to warfare declined and in which civilising institutions such as the Red Cross/Red Crescent and the Geneva Convention on the rules
of war grew, a labour rights and wider human rights movement matured, abolition of slavery globalised and an anti-mercenary norm consolidated (Percy 2007). It was also a century in which crime declined as social movements against capital and corporal punishment, and advocacy for the more humane treatment of state prisoners, grew (Braithwaite 1989: 111–18).

Sleepwalking into a violent century

One of the most insightful and careful of more than 10,000 books written on the history of the descent into World War I is Christopher Clark’s (2012) *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914*. We summarise only key aspects of its complexity in the next few pages and then use the summary to consider a secondary war-prevention analysis of its narrative from a cascades perspective. This sets up our big-picture narrative of cascades from World War I to other great conflicts of the next century. This elaboration is critical to reflect on the paradoxical nature of the cascade framework. A cascades analysis that instructs us in a dynamics of how violence can beget further violence seems at first a counsel of pessimism—not so when we iterate between the cascades analysis and a narrowing inquiry into preventive paths not taken. When we consider paths not taken at every level of the cascade, a politics of hope is enabled.

Cascades analysis provides an alternative way to normatively narrow the field of vision. Instead of asking who should be singled out for blame for causing the war, it asks who missed opportunities to prevent it. This leads to a long list of entries if we do the secondary cascades analysis of Clark’s narrative. From a cascades perspective, the more entries on this list, the more useful the diagnosis becomes. This is because each entry opens our eyes to a new way of seeing possibilities for a diplomacy of cascade prevention. It is an iterative form of normative narrowing that invites the cascades analyst to shuttle backwards and forwards between a focus on different paths not taken to preventive diplomacy. Multilateral processes of interaction can be diagnosed to animate multiplex war-prevention insights. On the negative side, complexity and chaos make the world difficult to understand; on the positive side, they mean preventive analysis is possible that identifies many of the right kinds of butterfly wings to flap (alongside some wrong ones) to tame the climate of violence.
Plate 2.5 Front page of the *Domenica del Corriere*, an Italian paper, with a drawing by Achille Beltrame depicting Gavrilo Princip killing Archduke Ferdinand of Austria in Sarajevo, 1914.

Source: Wikimedia.
An important feature of The Sleepwalkers is that it does not treat the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, Bosnia, on 28 June 1914 as merely a spark that lit a war made inevitable by larger structural forces. On that view of history, had the spark in Sarajevo not lit the conflagration, some other spark would have (MacMillan 2013). Clark’s comprehensive diagnosis of the way events unfolded to war, in contrast, convincingly argues that the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand, successor to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was much more than a pretext for a war that would have been justified by some other pretext, if not this one. Serbia and its terrorist assassins, in Clark’s (2012: xxvi) analysis, were no mere objects or victims of great power politics; Serbian nationalism was a historical force in its own right and its nationalists made the most important early moves to war. Clark endorses ‘some of the most interesting writing on the subject’ (e.g. p. xix, footnote 19), which argues that ‘far from being inevitable, this war was in fact “improbable”—at least until it actually happened’. Henry Kissinger’s (2014: 81) more recent diagnosis adds to that ‘interesting writing’:

[T]he war that overturned western civilization had no inevitable necessity. It arose from a series of miscalculations made by serious leaders who did not understand the consequences of their planning, and a final maelstrom triggered by a terrorist attack occurring in a year generally believed to be a tranquil period. In the end, the military planning ran away with diplomacy. It is a lesson subsequent generations must not forget.

Clark (2012: xxix) shows that rather than being structurally inevitable, war was improbable. Most decision-makers on all sides considered war improbable, with some good reason, until the final days of the crisis. ‘The people, events and forces described in this book carried in them the seeds of other, perhaps less terrible, futures’ (Clark 2012: xxix). Factors such as the structure of the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy) and the Triple Entente (Russia, France and the United Kingdom) were crucial to understanding the war, but Clark’s journey through its unfolding finds World War I was less a consequence of long-run deterioration, and more ‘of short-term shocks to the international system’ (2012: xxix).

Another important structural variable in the Clark analysis is the unsettling of alliance balances caused by the disintegration of empires. This book will come to conceive such unsettling as anomic in Durkheimian terms (Proposition 7). There is contingency, however, in how war contributes to such disintegration. Disintegration of the
ancient Chinese empire became an occasion for jostling between major powers for a share of it. Russian penetration of northern China in the 1890s ‘triggered a cascade of local and regional conflicts that culminated in the Sino–Japanese War of 1894–5’ (Clark 2012: 137). With Japan’s defeat of China, Japan thenceforth not only was a rival with Russia for domination of northern China, but also emerged as a major power. China’s defeat also triggered a race for concessions by great powers seeking to bite further chunks off China, which was too big for them to utterly swallow. ‘The negative energies generated by the race for China, in turn, heightened tensions in Europe’ (Clark 2012: 137; see further Neilson 1994).

Plate 2.6 Italian and Libyan corpses after the attack against ‘Ridotta Lombardia’, Libya, 1911.

For Clark, though, the decisive (anomic) unbalancing was the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. The beginning of World War I was in Africa. Perceiving the weakness of the Ottoman Empire, and wanting to join as a late starter in the race for colonies, Italy attacked and annexed the former breadbasket of the ancient Roman Empire, Libya, in September 1911. Perhaps half the Libyan population perished during the war of protracted resistance by Arab tribesmen (Simons 2003: 133). ‘This unprovoked attack on one of the integral provinces of the Ottoman Empire triggered a cascade [Clark chooses that word] of opportunist attacks on Ottoman-controlled territory in the Balkans’ (Clark 2012: 42). Libya flashed a green light emboldening multiple incursions into
Ottoman territories—‘breaking the ice’, as one British observer of the time put it. Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria and Greece, in loose alliance, launched parallel attacks on the Ottoman Balkans. This first Balkan war (October 1912 – May 1913) cascaded to a second Balkan war (June–July 1913) in which the belligerents fought with one another over the spoils won in the first. The biggest winner was Serbia, whose acquisitions included Kosovo—‘mythscape of Serbian national poetry’ (Clark 2012: 43)—which had been lost to the Ottoman Empire in a Serbian defeat on Kosovo Field in 1389. A creaking architecture of geopolitical alliances that had been containing local wars was swept away.

Clark finishes his book by asking the culpability question. He concludes that it is unproductive to attempt to settle who was to blame and problematic to presume that the objectives of one state were right, and another’s wrong. Clark (2012: 560) contends that ‘prosecutorial narratives … narrow the field of vision’ to the neglect of ‘multilateral processes of interaction’:

The outbreak of war in 1914 is not an Agatha Christie drama at the end of which we will discover the culprit standing over a corpse in the conservatory with a smoking pistol. There is no smoking gun in this story; or rather there is one in the hands of every major character. (Clark 2012: 561)

A smoking gun in the hands of every major character is an interesting way of seeing Iraq, Syria, Libya, Afghanistan, Pakistan and the DRC today. It is an interesting way of seeing a cascades theory. The thing about a chain of conjunctures that leads to an unlikely catastrophe is that preventive action at many links in that chain might have broken it. There were multiple nodes of decision-making along the chain of decisions to World War I. At each one, concerted efforts at preventive diplomacy might have interrupted the chain of causation.

What, then, is our secondary reading of Clark’s narrative that opens our policy imagination to how preventable, as opposed to how inevitable, was World War I? How can we awaken sleepwalkers of UN, EU and local diplomacy today to the iterated options for committed preventive diplomacy for disrupting a dynamic chain of conjunctures that can lead to war, or away from it? How can we focus on one preventive diplomacy option, then another, until this or that decision-maker acts to avert the war trajectory?
Preventive options

Consider the first link of Clark’s chain of conjunctures: Italy’s 1911 invasion of Libya. It was not that no one saw a potential cascade and no one warned Italy. Italy was warned that it had an opportunity to prevent a destabilisation that would come back to harm it and the rest of Europe. The German ambassador in Constantinople alerted the Italian ambassador that an Italian invasion of Libya could bring down the Young Turk regime and ‘trigger a sequence of disorders’ that would destabilise the region—a warning also issued to Italy by the Austrian foreign minister (Clark 2012: 246).

A warning, however, was not a concerted diplomatic campaign to put Italy under pressure to change course. Social change needs more than a warning that induces awareness of a risk; it needs ‘Awareness, Motivation and Pathways’ (AMP) to change (Honig et al. 2015). Indeed, most of Europe’s powerbrokers acquiesced in, or even encouraged, the course Italy took in Libya. So why would Italy have been motivated to consider an alternative pathway to its interests? Clark points out that Italy was balancing both desirable and ‘undesirable consequences’ that might cascade from its invasion, so tipping that balance might have been possible if traditions of preventive diplomacy had been more mature than they were in 1911. A state as powerful as Britain decided not to alienate Italy by opposing its occupation of Libya.

The Austro-Hungarian Empire initially resisted provocation by the terrorism of the Black Hand; it had no desire to invade Serbia, ‘an act that would have amounted to geopolitical suicide’ (Clark 2012: 364). The Black Hand terrorist movement was as much a threat to the authority of the Serbian Government as it was to peace in Europe. Had the Serbian Government nipped it in the bud early, the assassination that provoked Vienna to precipitate that very geopolitical suicide by attacking Serbia might have been averted. Moreover:

The interlocking commitments that produced the catastrophic outcome of 1914 were not long-term features of the European system, but the consequence of numerous short-term adjustments that were themselves evidence of how swiftly relations among the powers were evolving. And had the trigger not been pulled, the future that became history in 1914 would have made way for a different future, one in which, conceivably,
the Triple Entente might not have survived the resolution of the Balkan crisis and the Anglo-German détente might have hardened into something more substantial. (Clark 2012: 364)

While Clark points out paradoxical consequences of all the moves made, the main game for preventing catastrophe was more assertive diplomacy by both Germany and the United Kingdom to strengthen détente between them. Every player in the Great War was a terrible loser who never would have ‘drifted into war in August 1914 … could they have foreseen the world of 1918’ (Kissinger 2014: 83). Other leaders could see much more to gain than could the leaders of the United Kingdom and Germany, however. Serbia and Russia made important territorial gains from the war and in filling the geopolitical vacuums left by the demise of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires, even though Russia in the event reaped its 1917 revolution. France wanted revenge on Germany for its defeat in the Franco–Prussian war of 1870–71 to revive its great power stature and to regain Alsace-Lorraine from Germany. Germany and the United Kingdom allowed themselves to lose a generation to a war in which they had so little to gain compared with these lesser powers. They were the most geopolitically powerful actors before the war. They were in the best position to work with each other for a détente to calm their allies. They failed to prevent themselves from being led by the quests for territory and dignity of Serbia and quests of other lesser powers that responded to Serbia’s predicament. Another path to peace not taken: Anglo-German collaborative détente.

Instead, the cascade was that the Austro-Hungarian Empire marched on Serbia, Russia then joined to defend Serbia from Austria–Hungary and Germany then had little choice but to mobilise to defend its only major ally, Austria–Hungary. This drew in France, which was keen to settle its score with Germany in the best circumstances possible for France (in alliance with Russia and Serbia and with good prospects of drawing in the British Empire when Germany attacked Belgium to enter France). The British Cabinet was indeed reluctantly drawn in and, in 1917, the United States was engaged to end it. Far away from Serbia, Australia attacked and occupied Germany’s New Guinea colony, among other far-flung colonial cascades of conflict. Japan likewise seized the opportunity of German preoccupation in Europe to seize German colonies in the Pacific and, more importantly, in China. The rules of the game had become dangerously unsettled. Anomie globalised. Other intermediate powers such as Turkey and Italy were drawn in.
We can deploy Clark’s text to move back down from this high politics of preventive diplomacy to the most micro level of prevention: the utter bungling of security for Archduke Ferdinand’s visit to Sarajevo. Despite the fact that there had been warning of a potential attack, troops did not line the curbs of the street, as was usual for a cavalcade in an open car along a predictable route. The special security detail normally present had mistakenly been left behind at Sarajevo railway station. After a first bomb failed to hit its mark, the Archduke foolishly proceeded with his itinerary only to be killed along with his wife by a back-up assassin (Clark 2012: 369). In the era of modern terrorism, the micro-management of security is critical to preventing wars of revenge—wars of stupid resolve to be seen as not being pushed around by terrorists. Washington’s invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 was no less foolish than Vienna’s of Serbia in that regard.

A preventable assassination by unprofessional teenage assassins having occurred, there was little the Government of Serbia could do to prevent celebration of the murders by Serbian nationalists in coffee houses and in the media. Serbian leaders could have condemned those who were making heroes of the terrorists. They chose not to. Serbia could have conducted an internationally credible investigation of the Black Hand and arrested its ringleaders, but did not. Failure to do these things, and failures of great powers to insist that these things were done, infuriated the Austrian press and people who put Vienna under pressure to opt for a military response. We can see the parallel with the preventive diplomacy failure of the Afghan Government to be more proactive and decisive by arresting bin Laden in 1998 and 2001 and failing to be more public about its gestures towards making him available for an internationally credible criminal trial.

Even in the face of Belgrade’s failures, Vienna might have followed the advice of undersecretary of state Arthur Zimmerman of the German Foreign Office to avoid throwing ‘humiliating demands’ back at Belgrade. Instead, the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia—while mild compared with brash American ultimatums of recent decades—was what Winston Churchill described as ‘the most insolent document of its kind ever devised’ (Clark 2012: 456). Austria–Hungary would be at war with Serbia if the demands were not acceded to within 48 hours.
In spite of this sequence of failures to take preventive diplomatic paths, as the 48-hour deadline approached, there was alarm among the Serbian leadership at the prospect of an Austrian attack. They were minded to accept all the Austrian demands, but, ultimately, they did not do so and World War I was indeed the result. One reason they did not was pressure from the only ally who could save them, Russia, in the form of a telegram reporting that the Russian foreign minister ‘condemned the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum with disgust’, declaring that any state that acceded to such demands would commit ‘suicide’ and, furthermore, unofficially assuring Serbia that it could count on Russian support in a showdown (Clark 2012: 462).

So there were two paths to peace not taken here. One was the decision of the Serbian Government not to go further than it did in accepting Vienna’s ultimatum, especially when it came to easy concessions in relation to investigating the assassination. This was compounded by the decision of the Russian hawks to seize the moment to pass assurance to Serbia that it would back militarily a decision to stand on its dignity. The second path to peace not taken was the decision of the tsar and other Russian leaders not to pull their hawks back at that moment. The tsar failed to stop Russia from signalling war by massing troops. This was Kissinger’s lesson about preventing military planning from pre-empting diplomacy. That, in turn, connected to further failures of preventive diplomacy by Russia’s Triple Entente allies, France and the United Kingdom. They failed to apply concerted pressure to persuade Serbia (and Russia) to respond more apologetically and compliantly to Vienna. The reconciliation road not taken cost the Russian Empire 2–3 million lives and the tsar his throne.

Many of the decision-makers in this chain of events felt they were in a security dilemma (Proposition 5): perhaps war is inevitable, so it will be better if we strike them on our terms now that we are ready, rather than waiting for them to strike us later when they are stronger. Stephen Van Evera (1984) has described this as ‘the cult of the offensive’ that was a cause of World War I—that is, the (mistaken) belief of leaders that they had a better chance of victory in World War I through offence than through defence.

These security dilemmas were worsened by the fluidity of power within state executives that were in complex processes of transition from monarchy to parliamentary democracy. In this book, we come to identify this as anomie over not only what are the rules of the game but also who
is in charge: the president, the parliament, the prime minister or the king? New media pressures from proprietors who had learnt that bellicose appeals to national dignity sold newspapers were also buffeting states; none of them had been on twenty-first-century ‘peace journalism’ courses! Power within each executive had a tendency to migrate from one node of governance to another. To different degrees and at different times, in states such as Austria–Hungary and Russia:

[Power to shape foreign policy flowed around a loose human circuitry within the hive-like structure of the political elite, concentrating at different parts of the system, depending on who formed the more effective and determined alignments. (Clark 2012: 240)]

In Germany and the United Kingdom, as well as Austria and Russia, the sovereign no longer made a final call, but sometimes came into play to blur power relations. Mistrust, paranoia and a misunderstanding of the intentions of other powers were rife, fuelling these security dilemmas.

When hawks momentarily monopolised signalling on both sides of a conflict, rapid unexpected escalation frequently occurred. Later innovations in diplomatic communication, such as hotlines between decision-makers whose roles each side clearly understood, were advances that might also have broken the chain of actions leading to the Great War.

Contemporary preventive options and cascades

We now move from the beginning to the end of the twentieth century and to the current century to see why the cascade reading of *The Sleepwalkers* remains relevant. This is advanced by considering the war diplomacy of the three Bush administrations in the same conflicts discussed in the first half of this chapter. First, we consider the former Yugoslavia, then Libya, then the cascades from the two World Wars and then Congo and Africa’s great postcolonial cascades. The chapter concludes with an introduction to cascades in South Asia, using cascades in the Middle East and Afghanistan as a bridge to them.
Preventing Yugoslavia, 1990

Christopher Clark makes the point in *The Sleepwalkers* that, in the 1980s, historians and Westerners in general were prone to see the onset of World War I as a conflict of a distant era, of monarchs in hats with ostrich plumes, lead characters that barely resonate with modern politics. Yet Clark shows that, by 1914, seemingly powerful monarchs such as Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany, Tsar Nicholas II of Russia and George V of the United Kingdom were figureheads of modern executive governments. One way Clark helps us to see differently the cascades of violence of the Balkan wars is by taking the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand more seriously as a preventable spark. When Clark makes us see the assassination of the Archduke in Sarajevo, Bosnia, as the work of a transnational terrorist group with thousands of members—the Black Hand—he helps us see 1914 through a post-Yugoslavia, post–Al-Qaeda lens. The Black Hand project of a greater Serbia that conquered Muslim regions of the Ottoman Empire with significant Serb populations, such as Bosnia and Kosovo, was the project of Serbian president Slobodan Milošević in the late 1980s and 1990s. The cascade in Yugoslavia was from a short, minor independence war in Slovenia to a more major one in Croatia, to an even more terrible one in Bosnia and another in Kosovo that involved Montenegro and Serbia in attacks on Croatia and other former Yugoslav republics. These conflicts ‘ended’, as in World War I, with decisive US intervention: the US–NATO bombing of Serbian positions in Bosnia and then Belgrade itself.

Yugoslavia’s wars of the 1990s could have—should have—been prevented, before they broke out, by the European Community, the Soviet Union and the United States working together to warn Milošević that they would not allow him to pursue ethnically divisive Serbian chauvinism towards his goal of a greater Serbia. The defeat of Muslim armies by the adventurism of a Christian army in Bosnia and Kosovo was the last thing the world needed. Warning Milošević off could have been achieved by weight of great power diplomacy without dropping a single NATO bomb. Mikhail Gorbachev supported Milošević because Serbia had long been a pan-Slavic Russian ally, in a way Croatia and Josip Tito (a Croat–Slovenian) had not. Moscow saw Milošević as the best hope of holding Yugoslavia together, rather than seeing him in the more accurate way Western diplomats did. This more accurate Western view was of Milošević as the principal driver of a looming violent disintegration of Yugoslavia. One can perhaps excuse Gorbachev and his policy circle for this analytic error. He was in a weak
position, at risk from his own military, preoccupied with holding the Soviet Union together, and was prone to see a collapse of Serbian hegemony in holding Yugoslavia together through the lens of a precedent for a collapse of Moscow’s hegemony in holding the Soviet Union together. One can excuse Europe to a degree as well: it was distracted by the implications of the end of the Cold War for a new architecture of European foreign policy, it was arguing its way towards the Maastricht Treaty (1993) and was far from settling the very idea of a unified European Union with such a thing as EU foreign policy. It learnt much from Yugoslavia on why it needed such a policy to prevent cascades that spread from instability in the Balkans.

It is harder to excuse the failure of preventive diplomacy of the US administration of George H. W. Bush. By 1989, Bush was, according to Wikileaks and many other sources, in receipt of advice from the CIA of the risk of major war in Yugoslavia. The CIA was so firm in this analysis that, by 1990, it issued a National Intelligence Estimate that Yugoslavia ‘will break up’ and ‘this is likely to be achieved by ethnic violence and unrest that could lead to civil war’ (Marolov 2012: 9). While Gorbachev, by 1990, had become the weakest premier in the history of the Soviet Union, Bush was the most powerful US president history will ever see, with the end of the Cold War and in advance of the rise of China and a unified European foreign policy. He had the authority to persuade Gorbachev (who needed Bush desperately) to work in concert with him and the European powers to persuade Milošević to sheath his sabre. Diplomacy was needed that could be read as the resolve of the international community. That resolve could have been to signal support for deploying a large international peacekeeping force to position troops between Serbia and other republics if necessary to prevent escalation to war. Ultimately, the international community did deploy hundreds of thousands of peacekeepers, NATO and Russian, who remained in the former Yugoslavia long into the twenty-first century. NATO went even further and deployed the new smart bombs of American airpower. This was the tragedy of the presidency of George H. W. Bush. In circumstances in which the United States in the end would feel compelled to deploy military power in Yugoslavia after a cascade of war had spun out of hand, America looked inwards in 1990, failing to signal in advance a willingness to do what it ultimately did. Bush failed to assert preventive diplomacy. That diplomacy could have signalled the reality that, if push came to shove, the United States would use its military power to restrain Milošević. The international community
not only failed to prevent the initial war between Croatia and Serbia, it also failed to position troops to prevent the further cascade of Croatian and Serbian armies attacking Bosnia to carve it up.\(^\text{12}\) Later, it did learn this lesson by moving UN peacekeepers in early to prevent a cascade of the Kosovo conflict into a Macedonian civil war. Ultimately, joint NATO and Russian peace enforcement deployment that seemed difficult in 1989 became imperative a decade later when it happened in Kosovo. As UN and US diplomat David Phillips (2012: 208) said of the subsequent risking of UN peacekeepers in Macedonia: ‘The UN Preventive Deployment in Macedonia (UNPREDEP) was a model for preventive diplomacy.’

In sum, just as the Balkans crises cascaded after 1911—preventably—to much worse, so with the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries diplomacy of the three Bush administrations we see sleepwalking into cascades of violence from one Yugoslav republic to another, from one form of armed violence in Iraq to another, from one war to another in Afghanistan and from terror to more cascades of terrorism. Like the protagonists of 1914, Western powers in these recent conflicts were also ‘sleepwalkers, watchful but unseeing, haunted by dreams, yet blind to the reality of the horror they were about to bring into the world’ (Clark 2012: 562).

### Preventing Libya’s violence

NATO-driven regime change to oust Muammar Gaddafi in Libya was, for most UN Security Council members who voted for decisive military action, more about a responsibility to protect civilians than regime change (Puri 2016). But we concluded that the Security Council debate was thin on the risk that concerned many African Union diplomats—that war in Libya would spill into the larger African states to its south. In this case, we do not necessarily argue that Security Council members erred in voting the way they did. We simply note that, to a degree, the Security Council members were sleepwalking when they voted. The purpose of this book is to awaken sleepwalkers to look for the kinds of signals of cascade risks that the African Union leaders were signalling, but to which NATO diplomats

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12 This was the same tragic error that we saw in the diplomacy of the first Gulf War. The United States, which was in fact willing to go to war to prevent the invasion of Kuwait, failed to signal this inexorability to Saddam in advance of the mobilisation of his army. Of course, it can be a grave error to signal willingness to fight if a state has doubtful commitment to doing so, and it can be an even graver error to go to war. Yet, from a cascades perspective, there is no more foolish error than failing to signal willingness for war when a hostile act will in fact trigger a firm commitment to war.
were blind; though not all—NATO’s preeminent stateswoman, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, kept Germany out of the Libyan fray and Germany abstained from the Security Council resolution for a no-fly zone over Libya (Nelles 2011). Abstaining on the grounds of awareness of the problem and sympathy with the African Union’s alternative diplomacy does not comprise all three elements of AMP—Awareness, Motivation and Pathways to change (Honig et al. 2015). Instead of abstaining, Germany needed to mobilise its Awareness to Motivate other states to help lay that alternative Path of the African Union to a bloodless resolution.

Preventing cascades from world wars

Great power geopolitics at the level of scrambling NATO aircraft over Belgrade, Tripoli, Kabul and Baghdad has some elements in common with the sleepwalking into preventable cascades of violence of World War I. World War II was a cascade from World War I. Just as France pushed into World War I to restore the dignity it lost in its defeat by Germany in 1871, so Adolf Hitler pushed into World War II to restore the dignity lost at Versailles, as his bristling over Versailles in *Mein Kampf* makes very clear. One of our anonymous referees advanced the excellent contestation of this interpretation of German history by invoking Germany’s next cascade to peace: ‘One could argue that the utter humiliation of the German people in World War II actually contributed to their pacification and stopped the cascades of violence.’ The same point could be advanced for Japan, which became so nonviolent as the number-two economy in the world after 1945. Chapters 11 and 12 of this book are about how to go about making this reverse cascade into nonviolence happen more frequently. As Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi argued, domination, humiliation and violence create special opportunities to reciprocate violence with gifts of nonviolence. Our interpretation of why a defeated Germany cascaded violence after its defeat in World War I is that Germany was treated punitively, with Versailles being a degradation ceremony. In contrast, rituals of reintegration embraced Germany and

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13 In terms of the theory of defiance–deterrence we will introduce in Chapter 3, the Treaty of Versailles was ‘[t]oo punitive for conciliation, too lenient to keep Germany from recovering’ (Kissinger 2014: 83).

14 Hitler (1930: 483) argues in *Mein Kampf* that the Versailles treaty was ‘the greatest villainy of the century’. He described the German politicians who signed it as ‘miserable and degenerate criminals’ (or ‘the November criminals’). ‘Each point of that Treaty could have been engraved on the minds and hearts of the German people and burned into them until sixty million men and women would find their souls aflame with a feeling of rage and shame’ (p. 483).
Japan after World War II, the most important of which was the Marshall Plan to rebuild defeated economies and support the building of welfare states (Ahmed et al. 2001). Soviet policies towards Germans in Eastern Europe were not so reintegrative, and we will see how this cascaded rape, ethnic cleansing and many forms of violence to Germany’s east and south. Our research describes cascade patterns that are pregnant with complex possibilities for reversal by the jujitsu that is the strategy of nonviolence. This is because, as explained in the previous chapter, there is critical cognitive content in how action cascades: it can cascade with imaginaries of violence or with imaginaries of nonviolence.

The Russian Revolution was in many ways enabled by the enormous costs of Russia’s war with Germany: Germany cascaded violence intentionally through German agents smuggling Vladimir Lenin back into Russia from exile to create havoc (Snyder 2010: 16). Timothy Snyder (2010), in turn, conceives Joseph Stalin’s mass murder of millions of his own citizens in the 1930s as helping Hitler to justify his terror against communists and social democrats (before moving on to Jews and other groups). In turn, again on Snyder’s (2010) account, Hitler’s slaughter of German communists helped provide a justification for Stalin’s Great Terror inside the Soviet Union: ‘the direct physical liquidation of the entire counter-revolution’ (Order 004478, 31 July 1937, quoted in Snyder 2010: 66).^15

Just as World War I cascaded to the Russian Revolution, World War II cascaded to millions of further lives lost in the civil war that brought Chairman Mao Zedong to power in China:

> When the Japanese prime minister Tanaka Kakuei, in 1972, apologised to Chairman Mao for what his country had done to the Chinese during the war, Mao, who was not without a macabre sense of humor, told his foreign guest to relax: It is us who should thank you, he said; without you we would never have come to power. (Buruma 2013: 84)

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^15 Snyder (2010: 5, 258) concludes that the mutual cascading of mass atrocity between Stalin and Hitler cost 14 million civilian lives before the Russian and German armies went to war against each other in 1941. The master cleavage of World War II then interacted murderously with secondary and tertiary cleavages with a morphology comparable to that described for primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary cleavages in Myanmar’s recent conflicts in Chapter 9 (Propositions 2, 3 and 5). For example, Snyder here refers to subsequent cascades that then occurred after Germany and Russia went to war against each other: ‘In occupied Belarus, Belarusians killed other Belarusians, some of them as policemen in the German service, some of them as Soviet partisans. In occupied Ukraine, policemen fled the German service to join nationalist partisan units. These people then killed tens of thousands of Poles and fellow Ukrainians in the name of a social and nationalist revolution’ (Snyder 2010: 267).
The German surrender in 1945 accelerated historical change in the global character of armed violence. In hotspot after hotspot in Yugoslavia, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania and beyond, both Reich German and ethnic German populations were ethnically cleansed (Ferguson 2006: 583). This cascade of violence was the combined effect of unregulated local vengeance and Soviet policy, perhaps enabled by Churchill’s proposals at the Moscow Conference of October 1944. Possibly 13 million Germanic people were uprooted, with 2 million losing their lives in the process (Ferguson 2006: 584). This was only part of a wider process of 31 million people being uprooted across Europe between 1944 and 1948—a refugee crisis whose numbers were higher than today’s refugee crisis. This included Bulgarians driven out of eastern Macedonia and western Thrace, Greeks fleeing Macedonia and western Thrace, Greeks fleeing Turkey, Muslims fleeing Greece, Serbs ethnically cleansing Croats, Magyars expelled from southern Slovakia, Ukrainians driven from Poland, Ukrainian slaughter of Poles and Poles fleeing Russia. There was even a fully fledged pogrom against Jews in Kielce, Poland, in July 1946, among other cleansings (Ferguson 2006: 584; Lake and Rothchild 1998: 166–8). European states were greatly ethnically homogenised through this postwar bloodletting.

Knock-on wars followed to decide who the real winners of the two world wars would be in the Balkans and beyond; from the Greek civil war between Western-backed and Soviet-backed factions of 1946–49, which cost more than 100,000 lives, to much more bloody conflicts, such as the Chinese civil war and the Korean War, which was over whether Korea would come out of the war as a communist satellite or a US client. Both these wars took more than a million lives and both count among the 20 most deadly wars of recorded human history.

Yet, the biggest postwar cascade lay south of China and Korea. It arose from the ruthlessness of the Soviet Union’s consolidation of a new empire from 1945 and its pursuit of a catch-up nuclear weapons program.

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16 This was the so-called Percentages Agreement, in which, according to an aggrandising account made public by Churchill, Churchill proposed one-on-one with Stalin a division of Europe into spheres of influence. Churchill wrote on a piece of paper now held by the United Kingdom’s Public Record Office (PREM 3/66/7 (169)) that the Soviet Union should have 90 per cent influence in Romania and 75 per cent in Bulgaria; the United Kingdom would have 90 per cent influence in Greece and it would be 50/50 in Hungary and Yugoslavia. Stalin ticked it and passed it back. Churchill, however, did not mention in his autobiography that the next day the Soviets renounced key parts of the agreement when Churchill put it in writing and foreign ministers Vyacheslav Molotov and Anthony Eden did the serious negotiation of more nuanced, detailed and quite different understandings of what would happen in different parts of Europe (Kolko 1990: 145).
This was the Cold War between the superpowers. The United States and the Soviet Union were too afraid of nuclear weapons to fight each other directly. At this level, mutual deterrence at last exceeded mutual defiance (Proposition 1). But Cuban troops and the iconic imaginary of Che Guevara across Latin America and in Africa counted among the many agents of defiance in this Cold War (Proposition 1). As empires broke up, decolonisation interacted with deadly policies of civil war provocations against postcolonial regimes that aligned with the opposite side in the Cold War. The Cold War in the north became hot wars of the south. The tragedy in the south was that ‘the United States did almost as little for freedom as the Soviet Union did for liberation’ (Ferguson 2006: 617). Even more evocatively, Niall Ferguson suggests that people expected the third world war to become Third-World wars.

The Cold War was therefore one of the dynamics that drove the hotspot-to-hotspot and ethnic character of new wars, as distinguished from the interstate character of old wars (Kaldor 1999). Rivalry played out in this way meant that great powers could not mobilise to suppress defiance below deterrence in the south among lesser powers (Proposition 1). Nor could the United Nations do this when either the United States or the Soviet Union vetoed any resolution to deploy UN peacekeepers to suppress a civil war that disadvantaged their adversary. Only the end of the Cold War briefly brought two more peaceful decades in which there was enhanced cooperation among Russia, the United States and Europe to suppress civil wars. In the aftermath of the NATO hijack of the UN Security Council to support a war of regime change in Libya, the 2014–15 civil war in Ukraine and the abysmal failure of Washington–Moscow cooperation over Syria, the Moscow–Washington relationship was again an enemy of peace. Does this mean the UN Security Council can no longer collaboratively tackle catastrophes such as those in Syria, Iraq and Libya? It remains to be seen whether the rapprochement of US President Donald Trump with Moscow might end the risk of a new kind of Cold War.

Was there a failure of preventive diplomacy after 1990 in cornering Russia by expanding NATO into its old Eastern European empire instead of embracing Russia into a reintegrative new architecture? Had this been done, might it have been possible to reform the Security Council veto of permanent members so that the United Nations could act effectively in hard cases such as Syria? Instead of zero-sum moves to enhance NATO power at the expense of Moscow, were there not win–win options that expanded the power of both Russia and the West to solve pending
problems together? This embrace was accomplished with Germany and Japan at the end of World War II by rejecting the zero-sum politics of Versailles. Towards the end of Gorbachev’s premiership, the West did indeed seem to be heading towards a Marshall Plan mode of Russian reintegration. The attempted military coup against Gorbachev seemed to be the beginning of the end of Russian reintegration. It was not extended to Gorbachev’s successors.

In the civil wars inside developing countries that became the dominant form of warfare after the Korean conflict, cascades within cascades of violence were also very evident, as we saw in our earlier discussion of Congo’s wars and the ‘bloodlands’ that separated Hitler from Stalin (Snyder 2010; Propositions 2, 3 and 5). Many of these non-interstate wars were initially inside Asian and Latin American states, but, by the late twentieth century, they were particularly concentrated in Africa.

**Preventing Congo’s wars**

The Congo wars were the worst of them because they saw ‘up to 14 foreign armies’ fighting on Congolese soil, according to Autesserre (2010: 49). There were at least eight foreign countries with armies, plus Congolese state and non-state armies, plus the private military corporation Executive Outcomes (ICG 1998), mercenaries from Eritrea and Ethiopia (possibly with the blessing of their governments, possibly not) and mercenaries from Serbia and France (Reyntjens 2009: 62, 65, 114–15). Because Uganda fought in the DRC, Uganda’s enemy Sudan got involved and both launched raids on one another’s territory from Congo. This is one reason for Reyntjens (2009: 43) perceiving a cascade whereby ‘the Great Lakes conflict tended to merge with two others, the Sudanese and Angolan civil wars’. In 2017, Sudanese militias and organised crime groups are also worsening the great contemporary cascade from Libya by fighting as mercenaries in the Libyan civil war (Amin and Muhammed 2017), in the wake of Sudan being the largest African state fighting force during the 2011 Libyan war of regime change. For Uganda and Angola, one reason for entering the war in the DRC was to suppress one or more of its armed insurgency groups hiding in Congo. They were disappointed with the cascade that resulted: the general availability of arms inside the DRC meant these Ugandan and Angolan resistance movements actually strengthened in the course of the war (Muchai 2002: 188). In the case of Angola, this cascaded to reignition of a dormant civil war at home.
These states (Sudan, Angola and Uganda) were also involved in cascades of violence involving other warring states in north-east Africa: Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia and Eritrea. To the north-west, fighters from as far afield as Chad fought in the DRC. Libya did not send fighters but had multifarious covert involvements. These had an impact on how African countries reacted to the uprising to overthrow Gaddafi. This was related to why Sudan made particularly important contributions of tank and infantry units on the side of the 2011 Libyan rebellion, as did Qatar, with Egypt coming in on the opposite side to Qatar in the fighting currently under way in Libya.

To the immediate north of Congo, DRC refugees and fighters were pursued into the Central African Republic (to which Ugandan armed groups also fled) and refugees and fighters from Congo-Brazzaville’s quite separate wars between 1993 and 2002 were pursued by its armies in the opposite direction, into the DRC (Clark 2008). The two major armed groups of the Angolan civil war—the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and Angolan government forces—fought on different sides of the wars of the DRC and of Congo-Brazzaville. More than that, they fought each other in battles on the territories of both Congos. Congo-Brazzaville itself fought its rebels (supporters of former president Pascal Lissouba) in the DRC and DRC fighters in Congo-Brazzaville. Uganda also fought its rebels in the DRC, as did Sudan. Likewise, the two sides in Burundi’s civil war and in Rwanda’s civil war fought one another inside the DRC’s territory.

In sum, the civil wars of six foreign countries were fought inside the DRC. This was at the same time as many of Congo’s own civil wars cascaded. These were so numerous and cross-cutting that they are hard to count. The essence of why there has been more suffering caused by violence across a galaxy of hotspots in eastern DRC and across its borders during the past 23 years compared with any other region of the planet is that it has suffered so many dozens of diverse kinds of wars. It was a maelstrom of privatised criminalities and state criminalities cascading, one into the other.

Just as the war Libya fought with Chad meant there were implications for Libya when Chad became involved in the DRC, so the mobilisation of armies from Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe—former frontline states in the war with South Africa—had implications for South Africa. Just as Che Guevara had fought in Congo in the 1960s with president Laurent
Kabila, who seized power from president Mobutu in 1997, so Cuban fighters fought in the frontline states against South Africa. South Africa and Tanzania stayed out of the fighting in the DRC initially, but both sent peacekeepers who are now prominently taking sides in peace enforcement operations authorised by the United Nations in which thousands of fighters have been killed (mainly from the Congolese army and non-state armed groups). Since 2014, troops from many countries under the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) have fought aggressively and proactively against armed groups that are refusing to surrender. Even the US military had soldiers and drones deployed, particularly in pursuit of Joseph Kony, commander of the Lord’s Resistance Army, which operated in north-eastern DRC, Uganda, Sudan and South Sudan, but, more recently, mainly in the Central African Republic. After many years chasing a now-diminished Kony, the United States and Uganda gave up in April 2017.

Hence, we can conceive of Africa as afflicted with a set of interacting cascades of warfare, with the DRC being the most important hub of pan-African cascades. We have seen that these cascades have stretched from Zimbabwe and South Africa in the south to Sudan and Libya in the north, and from the Indian Ocean in the east to the Atlantic Ocean in the west.

These African cascades are important because fighting continues in a large proportion of the countries mentioned in the paragraphs above. These cascades of war are not ‘world wars’: they do not engage total war by a transcontinental power such as the British Empire; they engage only non-African states such as France and the United States with modest war-fighting engagements, and have not concentrated killing as intensively as World Wars I and II or the Indochina wars of the 1960s and 1970s. They have, however, lasted longer. So our diagnosis is that it is more productive to conceive of killing as cascading from north to south to east to west across Africa, hotspot by hotspot. This is a better analysis than classifying Nigeria as afflicted by a war in its north today and Niger as conflict-free because direct war deaths do not cross some quantitative threshold to become a national ‘civil war’.

Séverine Autesserre (2010, 2014) put her finger on the paradox of all this transnational complexity. Diplomats struggle to study its many strands; they master long lists of names of states that sponsor fighting groups in the DRC. As important as the transnational strands are, this process of
imperfect diplomatic mastery of the facts leads to the false conclusion that the DRC’s problems are predominantly international conflicts between different states of the region.

Autesserer’s research shows that Congo’s problems start as local ones that diffusely interact with transnational complexity. She does not use the terms hotspots or cascades. Yet her diagnosis of the roots of Congo’s conflicts is of cascades across local hotspots, rather than a national DRC conflict that internationalises. Local land, political, ethnic and other conflicts in eastern Congo were certainly harnessed by actors from other countries in Autesserre’s narrative. Like Kalyvas (2003, 2006), Autesserre’s explanation is about local cleavages that interact with transnational forces. Sometimes in her narrative, the international forces that enrol and are enrolled by (Latour 1986, 1987) the local are not states, but bits of states (such as a Ugandan army faction). What Autesserre most strongly resists is a dominant international relations narrative of a sequence of civil wars in the DRC that start when Hutu génocidaires flee Rwanda after that country’s genocide in 1994. That particular narrative continues that Hutu militias conducted raids back across the border against President Paul Kagame’s new Rwandan regime. Ultimately, Rwanda rallied its ally Uganda and other African countries to work together for regime change, to clean out nests of foreign militants in the DRC and to exploit its natural resources to their advantage. The civil war of 1996 under this dominant narrative is thus essentially an international war.

Autesserre rejects this dominant international relations narrative by pointing out that armed conflict inside eastern DRC over very local grievances began long before the Rwandan genocide. The problem with the dominant narrative is that it promotes a diplomatic fable that the essence of peacebuilding in the DRC could be the signing of international peace agreements by heads of states. Often international peace processes for the DRC, Autesserre finds, have done little to reduce killing; sometimes killing and refugee flows increased in the aftermath of peace agreements and in the aftermath of UN peacekeepers being deployed to enforce them. Twenty years on from the first civil war to depose Mobutu, the DRC is still not a ‘post-conflict’ society. The international community’s post-conflict peacebuilding did not begin to make a major difference until 2014 in the DRC because it sprung from this dominant international relations narrative. With Autesserre’s critique making a contribution, UN peacebuilding in the DRC since 2014 has made a better contribution.
than in the past. This is because it is more focused on resolving, hotspot by hotspot, some of the local grievances that were root causes of conflict—such as land disputes—long before the conflict internationalised.

Peacebuilding in the DRC has moved to a model of establishing local ink-spots of stability and civility and then expanding those ink-spots and connecting them one to another. From all this we learn that one deep danger of a cascades analysis is that it can mesmerise with myopic internationalism. This is why our starting framework insists on a micro–macro foundation and on the fundamental importance of many different levels of micro–macro cascading up, down and sideways.

While World War I was more driven by international diplomacy than Congo’s wars, our argument has been that Autesserre’s insight is still relevant to Europe’s ‘bloodlands’ (Snyder 2010). One of the significant levels at which an effective strategy for preventing World War I might have worked was disarming local terrorism and addressing the local grievances of the Black Hand. With the DRC, it is not that international peace agreements are unimportant; indeed, they are extremely important as nodes of cascade prevention. It is just that if we do not also invest in resolving particular land disputes at particular hotspots, in disarming little gangs as well as large armies at the hotspots, spot fires will reignite and spread spot to spot. In Parts II and III, we seek to develop some principles of cascade prevention that have this Autesserean quality.

In the terms of this book, we conceive the DRC as the most important node or cockpit for cascading violence out and in from a Great Lakes regional cluster of violence that includes Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi, but also countries that share a border with the DRC but are not included in the Great Lakes cluster—Angola, Sudan (now South Sudan), Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville) and the Central African Republic. Yet it is a DRC node and a Great Lakes regional cluster that cascade violence much more widely right across Africa.

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17 At the time of writing, this is very much at risk and violence in the DRC is on the rise again as a result of President Kabila refusing to step down after his constitutionally mandated term as president.
After our field research in Congo started seven years ago, we thought of it as unique, not because of how widely it cascaded violence, but because of how it became such a complex attractor of so many foreign conflicts. Our lens was focused at first on how genocide in Rwanda cascaded to a counter-genocide in the DRC, how Kony’s Lord’s Resistance Army cascaded conflict from Uganda to many regional countries, including the DRC, and how these and many other conflicts enrolled and were enrolled by very local Congolese armed conflicts. We then came to see it as unique because the civil wars of six foreign countries were fought inside the DRC. Syria has exploded since then. While far fewer people have been killed and raped in Syria and Iraq than in the African Great Lakes cascade, it still appears a young conflict that is quite a way off becoming ripe for peace. How did Syria come to stand alongside Congo as a conflict that became an attractor for many foreign conflicts? We rely on our Peacebuilding Compared interviews in most of the countries that sent large numbers of fighters to Syria to attempt a preliminary answer to this question.

Syria started as a nonviolent Arab Spring uprising against the tyranny of President Assad’s regime. That was an attractor for Al-Qaeda (its affiliate, the Al-Nusra Front) to convert Syria into a violent node of struggle for the caliphate. In turn, that cascaded to conflict between Al-Nusra and other Salafist militias supported by various Gulf states, particularly Qatar and Saudi Arabia, which hated Assad and Al-Qaeda. While many funders from these states sought to outflank Al-Qaeda with more ‘conservative’ fighters, Islamic State entered the fray to outflank Al-Qaeda’s shared battle against Assad with more ‘radical’ and ‘barbaric’ warriors for the caliphate. Islamic State fighters arrived from many Western countries and China, but in particularly large numbers from Libya and Tunisia and from Russia and former Soviet republics. The United States, the United Kingdom and France then joined the project of converting the democratic struggle into a civil war by attempting to arm the Free Syrian Army of pro-democracy defectors from Assad’s army, but in fact arming many others. Early in the war, the Free Iraqi Army was recruited from Anbar province and crossed the border into Syria to fight. The CIA funded training and logistics camps for Syrian opposition fighters in Jordan and Qatar. The analysis of the Syrian Kurd Democratic Union Party (PYD) leaders we interviewed (Interview, 2017, No. 041747) was that in 2011 and 2012 the United States had the power to prevent the cascade of war in Syria before it got
out of control, but it was not interested in doing so; it was more interested in regime change to remove President Assad. Western diplomats we interviewed questioned whether the United States had the capability in 2011–12 to control the regional forces marching to the drumbeat of war.

When Libyan Islamist militias became aware of the United States shifting weapons from Libya through Turkey to Syria after their defeat of Gaddafi, they got involved in capturing these weapons and joining the fight on the side of Islamic State. Later, Russia joined the civil war in a much bigger way than the United States to counter the influence the United States was exerting on the battlefield. This cascaded to a new kind of Cold War conflict, in parallel with the civil war in Ukraine, during Obama’s presidency. President Trump says he wants to end this contest through building a good relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Russia targets both Islamic State and Al-Nusra. Through pretending to moderate its religious politics in comparison with Islamic State, Al-Nusra has garnered support from NATO allies Saudi Arabia and Turkey. This is one of many complexities for rapprochement between the United States and Russia.

It has been reported that late in the war, China has become much more strategically aligned with the Russian position than simply supporting Russian vetos of UN Security Council resolutions on Syria. China has provided weapons, negotiated aircraft sales and provided technical people on the ground for the ‘rebuilding’ of Syria and training for Assad’s forces. Much speculation in UN corridors goes to alleged secret North Korean arms supplies to Syria trans-shipped through Chinese ports. Human Rights Watch (HRW 2014) has video of chlorine gas cylinders manufactured by the Chinese state company Norinco used in chemical weapon barrel-bomb attacks in Syria. China is reportedly concerned to clean out concentrations of Chinese Uyghur Islamic State fighters from Xinjiang province who are fighting in Syria. China believes some of them have been trained in Syria and then sent back into China to foment terrorism. China’s more assertive engagement with the war is consistent with its recent placement of special forces on the ground in Afghanistan to fight Xinjiang Islamists there.

Much earlier than Russia’s arrival as an important combatant, Iran perceived a security dilemma: all its enemies were beginning to cascade into a war against its only Arab ally, Syria. These enemies included Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, Al-Qaeda, Islamic State and the United
States. So Iran quickly became the country with the largest number of foreign troops on the ground in Syria in the form of its own Republican Guard and Lebanese Hezbollah fighters, who had long been its proxies against Israel.\footnote{As one influential advisor to the Government of Iran put it: ‘Hezbollah’s rockets do our deterrence’ (Interview in Tehran, 2017, No. 041717). This advisor saw Hezbollah as the vital Iranian asset and Syria as valuable for supplying that asset. There was no possibility of a military solution in Syria by 2017 for any of the players, including Iran, he believed. Yet, as in other interviews in Iran, Iran was conceived as having an interest in deterring anyone, especially the United States and Israel, from indulging regime-change adventurism in Iran. Such deterrence was accomplished through Hezbollah threatening a new Lebanon war against Israel, through threatening to stir conflict in Iraq, Bahrain or Yemen or by lighting a spark somewhere else in the region. Yemen he conceived as a ‘quagmire’, where Iran’s substantive interests were slight, but where it had an interest in ‘leverage against the Saudis’ (Interview in Tehran, 2017, No. 041717). Surprisingly, in some of our interviews with strategic elites in Iran there was some guarded degree of optimism that President Trump could prove the ‘dealmaker’ president who could do a deal that gives Iran the guarantee of security to persuade them to stop cascading regional violence in this way. This was tempered with pessimism that the United States allows its allies to sponsor terrorists when the terrorists threaten US adversaries: ‘The West does not want to think deeply or inquire deeply into the infrastructure of terror and the infrastructure required to defeat it. They think in an instrumental way. Let terrorism grow if it is not a threat to my national interests. Not a direct threat’ (Interview in Tehran, 2017, No. 041717). The head of a regional Kurdish intelligence agency has a similarly surprising degree of optimism about possibilities in the longer term for some kind of regional grand security bargain that embraces Israel and Iran into mutual security guarantees: ‘Iran has a bigger dream of … finally getting support and acceptance from major powers. That is more important to them than the smaller opportunity of being able to make it easier for Hezbollah to cause trouble in Israel. Iran craves guarantees of protection from greater powers’ (Interview in Iraq, 2017, No. 0417490). In a similar vein, a Western ambassador to Iran said: ‘Iran is ready to kiss and make up with the Saudis’ (Interview in Tehran, 2016, No. 051611).} Israel then could not resist opportunities that presented themselves to attack the forces of their most dangerous enemy when Hezbollah was operating in Syria close to Israel’s border. The war also supplied Israel with opportunities to hit Iran’s military supply routes to Hezbollah and logistics bases inside Syria for transit to Lebanon. The Shia armies of Iran and Hezbollah becoming the most formidable forces for defeat of Islamic State and for the defence of Assad motivated Gulf states, Israel and the United States to put ever more resources into funding forces opposed to both Assad and Islamic State. The Kurds became the most militarily decisive of these in routing Islamic State. Now Syria, in parallel with Yemen and Iraq, was a massive proxy war for the religious leaders of the Shia and Sunni. In fact, these proxy wars were three-way conflicts among Islamic State Sunnis, anti–Islamic State Sunnis and Shia armies.

Hence, the dominant Western media narrative of the Syrian war has some truth, but is crudely oversimplified. This narrative sees the war as one in which all sides oppose Islamic State, with Iran and Russia supporting Assad and the United States and Saudi Arabia leading the opposition to
Assad. All sides for years played the game of accusing each other of being soft on Islamic State (for example, allowing them to escape rather than killing them) while killing allies in the fight against Islamic State.

Iran also feared that in time another important enemy, Iranian Kurdish insurgents (who were mostly in exile in Iraq), would join the fighting in Syria. This fear was ultimately realised, even though the Syrian Kurds for a long time desperately tried to stay neutral in the civil war. When they suffered savage attacks from Islamic State, they saw no option but to throw their 60,000-strong army into the battle (with formidable logistical and air support from Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Russia). Hundreds of US soldiers were in 2017 reportedly on the ground in Syria training Kurdish YPG militia. The Syrian Kurds received support from some 160,000 Iraqi Peshmerga fighters and large numbers of Iranian and Turkish Kurd fighters.

This brought Turkey into the war. Turkey had also tried to stay on the sidelines for a long time, though it provided weapons to some of the same Salafist militias supported by some Gulf states. Kurdish fighters who cascaded into Syria from Turkey, Iran, Iraq and the West consolidated into the most effective army against Islamic State. This massively effective militarisation of the Kurds threatened Turkey, which bombed them from the air and with artillery from the ground, indulged in cross-border operations to kill them and supported Al-Nusra’s Al-Qaeda forces when they killed Kurds. Just as Islamic State and Al-Nusra fought on the same side much of the time against Assad’s army, and also fiercely fought each other at times for supremacy as flag-carriers for the caliphate, likewise Kurdish forces mostly worked together but sometimes fought each other. Battles broke out for Kurdish supremacy between the Turkish-led and Syrian-led PKK-sponsored Kurds (who received help from Iran) and those led by Iraq and sponsored by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) (who received help from Turkey, Germany and the United States). This fighting was about the pretensions of KDP leader Masoud Barzani to supplant the Turkish PKK leadership and the Syrian Kurd leadership to become the godfather of the historical struggle for greater Kurdistan.

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19 In interviews with senior PKK (Turkish Kurds) and PYD (Syrian Kurds) (Interviews, 2017, Nos 041754 and 041747), it was also alleged that Turkey had sent hundreds of truckloads of weapons to Islamic State fighters who were attacking the Syrian Kurds. They described weapons they captured from Islamic State with Turkish identifiers. But other sources did not confirm this.
Factionalism within the Palestinian civil war has also been fought out inside Syria. Many Palestinian refugees in Syria supported the Arab Spring uprising against Assad. Many of them were killed by the army of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command. This was a faction led by Ahmed Jibril, who, from 1968, split with Yasser Arafat for accommodating Israel too much. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command fought with Assad’s army during the civil war. More specifically, a great battle raged for control of the region around the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp in Damascus between the Syrian army and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command on one side and the Free Syrian Army and the Palestinian fighters of the Liwa al-Asifa, or Storm Brigade, on the other.

Plate 2.7 Crowded conditions in Yarmouk, a Palestinian refugee camp in Damascus, 2017. The people here are lining up for food.
Source: Photograph by Jordi Bernabeu Farrús. Wikimedia, via ‘The crisis unseen’, *The Islamic Monthly*.

Another neglected conflict has been what we can now call, and the United Nations has now called, the genocide against the Yazidis in northern Iraq and Syria. Genocides against peoples who do not have a large diaspora attract limited interest from the West. There are only 500,000 members of this religious minority on the planet. Islamic State’s genocidal slaughter
of Yazidi men and the sexual enslavement of 3,500 Yazidi women follow a succession of genocidal attacks on Yazidis by extremist Sunnis across the history of the Ottoman Empire—for example, in 1640 and 1892 (Allison 2017). Yazidis from surrounding countries such as Iran cascaded in to defend their fellow Yazidis from Islamic State.

In sum, Syria is like the DRC in the way more than a dozen foreign armies have been attracted by the opportunities to fight hot wars with each other on Syrian soil, while indulging only in cold wars on their own soil. Syria is unlike the DRC in that so many major powers have at least special forces on the ground: Russia, the United States, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran and perhaps even China has more than just intelligence officers in the country, as do probably some more major powers. Syria is also unlike the DRC in that the air forces of so many countries have massively hit targets in Syria with horrific consequences for civilians—including the air forces of Syria itself, Turkey, Israel, Russia, the United States, Jordan, the United Kingdom, France, Canada, Australia and probably others.

On further reflection, we must conclude that seemingly never-ending wars such as those in the DRC and Syria, where many other countries are attracted to fight their own proxy wars on the soil of a battle-torn country, are not so unique in human history. The Thirty Years’ War (1618–48) involved many European states fighting one another in a war fought almost totally on the soil of what is today known as Germany.20

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20 I am grateful to one of my 2017 Iranian interviewees for drawing the comparison between Syria and the Thirty Years’ War. He was a former intelligence official and former advisor to an Iranian president who started by saying that Israel was a big winner from the disintegration of Syria, after discussing how Israel’s most effective enemies in Libya (notably Gaddafi), Egypt and beyond were also gone as a result of the Arab Spring and the Arab League had disintegrated into political impotence: ‘Most of Israel’s enemies have gone through fighting each other. Assad is on the way to being gone. Turkey is divided against itself. Saudi Arabia also must be seen as having fundamental internal division between the royal family, which wants to accommodate the new, and the religious establishment, which is against all accommodation to the new. In this complex political stand-off, to keep the show together, Saudi Arabia needs a scapegoat. Iran and its alleged hegemonic ambition is that scapegoat … Instability in Saudi Arabia is not in the interests of Iran. We have a strong consensus on that. Instability in Saudi Arabia would be worse for everybody. And we don’t want that … The current situation in the Middle East is like the Thirty Years’ War of Europe. It was ended. Its outcome was the establishment of a system of nation-states. What we worry is that this 30 years’ war in the Middle East could result in the demise of nation-states. Syria is obviously a prime candidate. Kurdistan is another issue. Even Iraq’s territorial integrity is in danger. At best, the West does not care. Almost all wars begin with optimism of the high command. They say, as was said by military commanders in the Syrian war, that “the downfall of Bashar al-Assad is only a matter of weeks” [he mentioned the name of a Western general who said this years earlier] … There is a stalemate in Syria now. The challenge for all the players is how to achieve disengagement without disintegration [note re Proposition 10]’ (Interview in Iran, 2017, No. 041718).
The national armies of major powers Sweden, France, Spain and Austria fought, as did the imperial army of the Holy Roman Emperor and the armies of German Protestant states. As in Congo, however, here, so many of the worst atrocities were committed by mercenary armies who were paid to be proxies of states. The United Kingdom, the Dutch Republic and Denmark funded many mercenary Protestant militias. It was a war that cost the lives of probably 20 per cent of the German population (HISTORY.com 1996). What started as local conflicts over Protestant or Catholic control of a region attracted financial support from major Protestant and Catholic powers and then morphed into a full-blooded war in which the armies of the great powers slugged it out on German soil.

The Thirty Years’ War was ended by the grandest of grand bargains in human history: the Peace of Westphalia that created the contemporary state system of sovereignty and mutual respect for religious difference—a quantum step towards Europe’s civilising process. We have seen that the DRC also took significant steps towards civilising violence by grand bargains signed by many African states, but that local peacebuilding that spread one ink-spot of peace to connect to another has also been vital in the gradual process of civilising violence there. We are authors who are ignorant about whether the grand bargain of Westphalia was complemented by valley-to-valley Protestant–Catholic reconciliation during the seventeenth century that bequeathed a religiously tolerant Germany to European civilisation. Learning whether or not this did happen would be a worthy research project from a cascades of peace perspective.

People who pretend that they understand wars such as those in the DRC and Syria and the Thirty Years’ War tend to be charlatans. Honest analysts admit they grasp only some small parts of the complexity. Complex attractors that cascade in foreign wars are hard to end because peace in any part of the battlefield will disadvantage one combatant or another. Local peace zones such as the de-escalation zones agreed by Russia, Turkey, Iran and Syria in 2017, and the newer de-escalation zone agreed between Putin and Trump later in 2017, are positive peacemaking initiatives. Yet, cross-cutting complexity makes them hard to sustain against spoilers. Hence, we suspect that a combination of grand bargains, de-escalating peace zones and local reconciliations in responsive interaction are needed with such wars of wickedly cascaded complexity. Our analyses of Afghanistan and Kashmir (particularly in Chapter 5) begin to explore that hypothesis.
Preventing cascades in South Asia

This book seeks to show why cascade explanations inform a different way of thinking about the geopolitics of the most serious wars across the globe at the time of writing. Our South Asian analysis in Part II concludes that the DRC and Afghanistan may have been replaced with Pakistan between 2007 and 2012 as the most violent country on the planet if one counts all the forms of violence that cascade to and from war: state crime against civilians, torture, disappearances, homicide, suicide bombing, drone attacks and more (Karstedt 2014). This was before Syria exploded to become the most violent country.

Our diagnosis in Chapter 4 and Part III of this volume is that some profound cascades of nonviolence were in play up to 1914. We think that, at least until 1914, Pinker (2011) is right that not only Europe (Eisner 2003), but also Asia (Broadhurst et al. 2015; Spierenburg 2008, 2013: 69–72; ter Haar 2000) experienced perhaps nine centuries of long-run decline in the rate of violence from killing by war and crime (including state crime).

The focus of the current book is neither on cascades of violence across the African periphery of the global system nor on cascades from warmaking through NATO or Russian power at the geopolitical centre. Their importance was only in helping us to formulate our 10 cascade propositions and as a lens for seeing their geopolitical importance. Rather, our detailed focus falls in between the African periphery and NATO/Russian geopolitics, on cascades of violence across the emergent powers of South Asia. These include three countries that count among the 10 most populous in the world—India, Pakistan and Bangladesh—and two of the world’s nuclear powers. Obviously, these cascades will prove different in character from the three major cascades discussed in this chapter. One point of discussing them is to sensitise us to ways in which the cascades of violence we study are unique in comparison with other major cascades. To the extent that they are different, South Asian cascades are a misleading grounding for the development of explanations of any relevance beyond South Asia. The other three contemporary cascades briefly engaged in this chapter do show, however, that as large and prolonged as the cascades of violence are in South Asia, they are hardly uniquely large and enduring. Likewise, Europe’s Thirty Years’ War reveals the 30-plus years of war of Kashmir–Pakistan–Afghanistan as less than
unique. The enduring impacts of the pan-European–Ottoman cascades of World War I that continue today in parts of the former Yugoslavia, the pan-European–Asian cascades of World War II and the pan-African character of the cascades that continue in Africa all have great relevance to explaining why the 107 years since 1911 were so much more bloody than the century before. We explore in Part II how South Asian cascades also make a large contribution to that sad result. In Parts II and III, we also seek to diagnose, in more contextualised ways than in Part I, how cascades of violence in South Asia might have been prevented.

Alex Braithwaite’s (2016) study of 2,331 ‘militarised interstate disputes’ since 1816 excludes the intrastate wars that account for most of the cascading of violence we have considered for recent decades. Even so, his interstate militarised disputes since 1990 do form four major clusters discussed in this chapter. One is the Great Lakes region of Africa, another the Middle East (or, more widely, the disintegrated Ottoman Empire), another is the Balkans (and the disintegrated Yugoslavia) and the fourth is Kashmir–Pakistan–Afghanistan and their immediate South and Central Asian neighbours (A. Braithwaite 2016: Map 1.5). In the period before that (1946–89), Indochina and East Asia are strong clusters, as discussed in Chapter 1, as are Central America and the Caribbean, which will be discussed in Part III. When the interstate conflict data are taken further back, before the Marshall Plan and the consolidation of the European Union (back to 1816), Western and Central Europe become more central to the clustering of militarised hotspots (A. Braithwaite 2016: Maps 1.3, 1.12).

Finally, a reason to study the largest cascades since the 1911 Italian invasion of Libya is to begin the journey of discovery towards understanding cascade mechanisms that might be of more general import. In Part II, that journey begins in a more systematically grounded way. In the next chapter, it begins by considering the first five cascade propositions.
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