

The Relationship between Ceasefires and Fatalities After Conflict between 1989 and 2024

Researcher: Ning Ning (Ayane) Yamada

Economics & Peace, Conflict, and Justice, University of Toronto

Supervisor: Dr. Chang Peng Kee

School of Media and Communication, Taylor's University

Introduction:

When I was nine, on the day of the Japanese Star festival, I wished on the tanabata tree for “peace in the world”. While over the years I understood the absolute utopian nature of my wish, it still shocks me to see my interest in conflict studies parallel the seeming growth of violence in the world. With the expansion of institutions and studies, it seems bizarre that eruptions of violence overwhelm the number of resolutions observed in recent decades.

Amid this intellectual unease, I encountered Edward N. Luttwak’s “Give War a Chance”. Luttwak advances an unsettling claim: that ceasefires, often celebrated as instruments of peace, may function instead as encumbrances – external impositions that interrupt the brutal but potentially necessary and natural flows that allow wars to exhaust themselves.¹ His argument presses an uncomfortable possibility that our most well-intentioned institutional remedies may, in practice, prolong or even intensify violence. Yet Luttwak’s provocation rests on a narrow empirical base, drawing primarily on case studies from the Balkan wars and thus offering only a partial view of how ceasefires function across different conflict settings. Although later scholars have taken his argument seriously, much of this engagement remains qualitative or relies on quantitative approaches that sidestep the central question. Studies such as Roy Licklider’s “The Consequences of Negotiated Settlements in Civil Wars” and Monica Toft’s “Ending Civil Wars: A Case for Rebel Victory” shift attention toward war recurrence following military victories or peace agreements, rather than toward ceasefires themselves. This shift is consequential. Unlike peace agreements, ceasefires do not aim to resolve the underlying conflict; they merely interrupt violence, often temporarily, and are frequently dismissed as institutional stopgaps.² To evaluate whether the substantial resources devoted to ceasefires are warranted—particularly when a negotiated settlement remains out of reach—they must be examined on their own terms. Moreover, the prevailing emphasis on war recurrence, defined by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) as exceeding 1,000 battle-related deaths in a single year, obscures the persistent forms of violence and instability that continue below this threshold, precisely where ceasefires are most likely to matter.³

Research Questions:

Through this project, I aim to answer the primary questions of **do ceasefires lead to more fatalities after the termination of a conflict?** and **how should ceasefire strategies change to increase post-conflict stability?**

In addition, I will be asking secondary questions throughout the process such as: what shortcomings are there in present research in the operationalization of impacts of ceasefires?; what key variables influence the impacts of ceasefires?; what are key characteristics that create outliers in the dataset?; how do current UN ceasefire strategies differ from quantitative results found in this study?

¹ Edward N. Luttwak, “Give War a Chance,” *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 4 (1999): 36–44, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20049362>.

² Monica D. Toft, “Ending Civil Wars: A Case for Rebel Victory?” *International Security* 34, no. 4 (2010): 7–36, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40784560>.

³ Stina Höglbladh, *UCDP GED Codebook, Version 25.1* (Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 2025).

Methodology:

1. First, I will conduct an annotated bibliography and literature review across scholarly articles on the topic of impacts of ceasefires. During this process, I will especially focus on the operationalization of ceasefire impacts, examining the efficacies of existing operationalization methods on addressing such research.
2. During the second phase, I will focus on the quantitative analysis of existing records of ceasefires and other conflict termination cases.
 - a. A key dataset that will be used is published by the UCDP that primarily looks at conflicts from 1989 to 2024. Python code will be written in Jupyter Notebook to combine the UCDP dataset with the Civil Conflict Ceasefire Dataset and the World Development indicators provided by the World Bank.
 - b. In addition to standard descriptive statistics, the Zero-Inflated Negative Binomial (ZINB) distribution will be applied to identify key predictors of ceasefire impacts.
3. I will then move on to using qualitative analysis by exploring the contexts of the key case studies and outliers presented in the quantitative phase.
4. Lastly, I will present a comparative analysis of the results from this project to the strategies for ceasefires presented by the United Nations Peacemaker website.

Ethics Review:

This project will not require a REB approval because it does not involve human or animal research and relies on public datasets.

Interdisciplinary and/or International Focus of the Research

This research naturally holds an international focus, as it hopes to look at the effects of ceasefires beyond just a specific territorial region, exploring possible patterns that exist across ceasefires beyond territorial and temporal boundaries. In addition to the international focus, this project naturally holds an interdisciplinary aspect through its strong focus on incorporating statistical techniques for the quantitative analysis of this research. Prior to writing this proposal, I received guidance from my supervisor on the difficulty in integrating conceptual clarity with technical rigor in quantitative conflict research. After all, statistical analyses often prioritize methodological sophistication at the expense of theory, or conversely rely on strong conceptual claims without sufficient empirical grounding. As a student of Peace, Conflict, and Justice, alongside Economics with a focus on data analytics, I aim to examine ceasefires through a framework that treats technical method and conceptual interpretation as mutually reinforcing rather than competing demands.

Outcomes:

This project will attempt to provide a broader outlook into the impacts of ceasefires by exploring a larger scope of case studies through UCDP datasets and a larger set of variables through the supplementary datasets. Through analysis conducted with emphasis on both quantitative and qualitative methods, I hope to provide more contextual explanations to quantitative results that traditionally have not been explored as much before. Moreover, the additional effort to directly compare discovered results to modern UN strategies will bridge scholarly studies to the real world and provide empirical evidence suggesting modifications or back strategies that are currently being employed.

Research Advisor:

My research advisor, Professor Chang Peng Kee, will be providing guidance through online meetings and emails throughout the project. Through Professor Chang's substantial experience in research in the social sciences, he will guide me in aspects of research design, theoretical framing, data analysis, and academic writing.

Bibliography:

Högbladh, Stina. *UCDP GED Codebook, Version 25.1*. Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 2025.

Kreutz, Joakim. "How and When Armed Conflicts End: Introducing the UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset." *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 2 (2010): 243–50.

Licklider, Roy. "The Consequences of Negotiated Settlements in Civil Wars, 1945–1993." *American Political Science Review* 89, no. 3 (1995): 681–90.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2082982>.

Luttwak, Edward N. "Give War a Chance." *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 4 (1999): 36–44.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/20049362>.

Toft, Monica D. "Ending Civil Wars: A Case for Rebel Victory?" *International Security* 34, no. 4 (2010): 7–36. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40784560>.

United Nations. *Ceasefires and Security Arrangements*. Accessed February 1, 2026.
<https://peacemaker.un.org/en/thematic-areas/ceasefires-security-arrangements>.