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We're Seeing a Trend Toward Less Violence in the World

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At an event in May, **President Obama noted**: "The world is less violent than it has ever been." It might seem difficult to reconcile this sentiment with daily horrors in the Middle East, terrorist attacks and other media-hyped doom and gloom. But he's right: Though violent conflicts still happen around the world, the broad trend lines are all in the right direction.

The number of conflicts, whether between states or within them, has fallen dramatically in recent decades. Between 1990-2014, the **overall number of conflicts** fell 40 percent. And while there will always be extreme cases like the violence in Syria, today's conflicts in general have **lower levels of violence**. Perhaps more important, modern wars tend to be small and localized; the most destructive and costly kind of war -- conflict between great power states -- has not occurred for more than 60 years. Even terrorism is far less of a concern than many assume, particularly for those who live outside war zones. For an American, the **odds of dying in a terrorist attack** is an astronomically unlikely one in 45 million.

To be sure, there are still intractable conflicts in the Middle East, Latin America and elsewhere. Colombia may have reached a tentative peace deal, but diplomats have so far been unable to find peaceful resolution to conflicts in Syria, Yemen, Ukraine and elsewhere. Political science research suggests that some of these will be **difficult to resolve**: Studies show that the average civil war lasts about 10 years, and can be worsened by the involvement of external states, a fact that goes some way toward explaining the Syrian quagmire. But these contemporary conflicts simply cannot compare to the carnage of the two World Wars, or the Cold War threat of nuclear annihilation.

Over the long-term, the president is right. The world is **trending away from violence**.

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