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**COMPREHENSIVE NEW STUDY CHALLENGING EXPERT CONSENSUS FINDS
INCIDENCE OF TERRORISM DECLINING AROUND THE WORLD**

Terrorism Fatalities Decline as Muslim Support for al-Qaeda Terror Network Plummets

Number of Wars and Death Tolls in Africa Down Dramatically Since 1999

NEW YORK, May 21 2008—Challenging the expert consensus that the threat of global terrorism is increasing, a new report from the Canadian research team that produced the much-cited *Human Security Report* in 2005, reveals a sharp net decline in the incidence of terrorist violence around the world.

The *Human Security Brief 2007* demonstrates that:

- Fatalities from terrorism have declined by some 40 percent, while the loose-knit terror network associated with Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda has suffered a dramatic collapse in popular support throughout the Muslim world.
- There has been an extraordinary, but largely unnoticed, positive change in sub-Saharan Africa's security landscape. The number of conflicts being waged in the region more than halved between 1999 and 2006; the combat toll dropped by 98 percent.
- The decline in the total number of armed conflicts and combat deaths around the world that was reported three years ago in *Human Security Report 2005* has continued.

The *Brief* was produced by the Human Security Report Project (HSRP) research team at Simon Fraser University's School for International Studies in Vancouver, Canada. The HSRP's research is supported by the governments of Canada, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland and the UK.

PART I: Explaining the Decline in Global Terrorism

Since the September 11, 2001 al-Qaeda assault on the United States, the consensus among Western experts has been that the threat of terrorism, particularly Islamist terrorism, has grown. This was the view of the 2006 and 2007 US National Intelligence Estimates; of one hundred foreign policy and security experts surveyed by *Foreign Policy* journal in 2007, and a 2007 report on the terrorist threat to Europe from the director of the UK's Security Service.

The Human Security Report Project has analyzed the statistical trends created by three major terrorism research institutions in the US—The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), the Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism (MIPT), and the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland—and offers a different interpretation. The Project's analysis is not only the most comprehensive to date, it also poses a major challenge to the expert consensus.

The NCTC is the official government agency charged with monitoring the incidence of terrorism around the world. Created in 2004, it is the best resourced of the three institutions, but it only has comprehensive data on terrorist attacks and fatalities from 2005. MIPT, and the relatively new START, have both been funded by the Department of Homeland Security. Each has statistics on domestic and international terrorism dating back to 1998.

The trend data generated by these institutions appear to support claims that the threat of terrorism is increasing. All three datasets estimate that global terrorism fatalities rose dramatically in the wake of the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq. In each dataset it is fatalities in Iraq that drive the global trend. MIPT's data, for example, indicate that in 2006, Iraq accounted for a startling 79% of the *global* terrorism death toll; NCTC's estimate was 64 percent.

Why the Expert Consensus is Wrong—and the Data Are Misleading

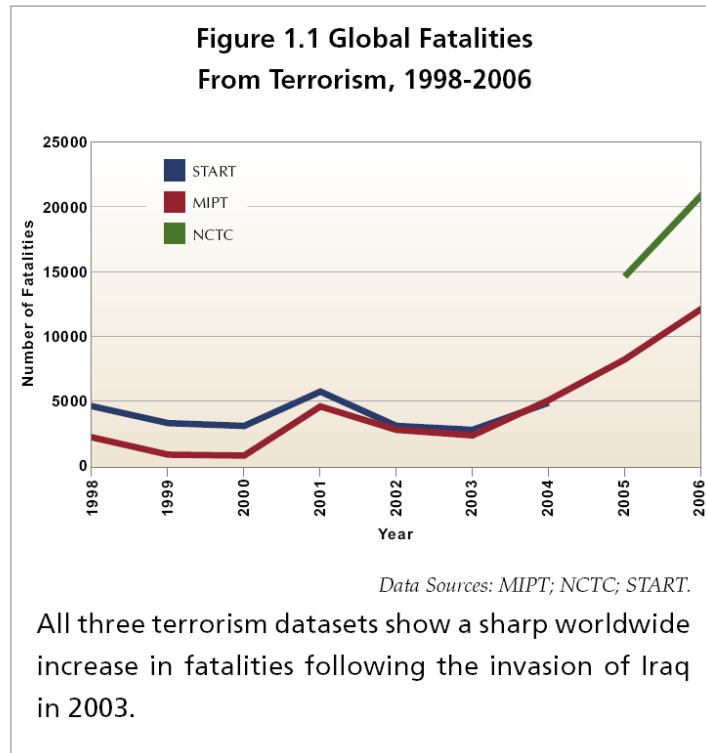
Terrorism is a contested concept that can legitimately be defined in very different ways. However, different definitions can have a major impact on global fatality estimates. When terrorism is defined one way, the trend data indicate that the incidence of terrorism increased to 2006; defined another way, they reveal a decline.

The MIPT and START trend data from 1998 are misleading in two ways.

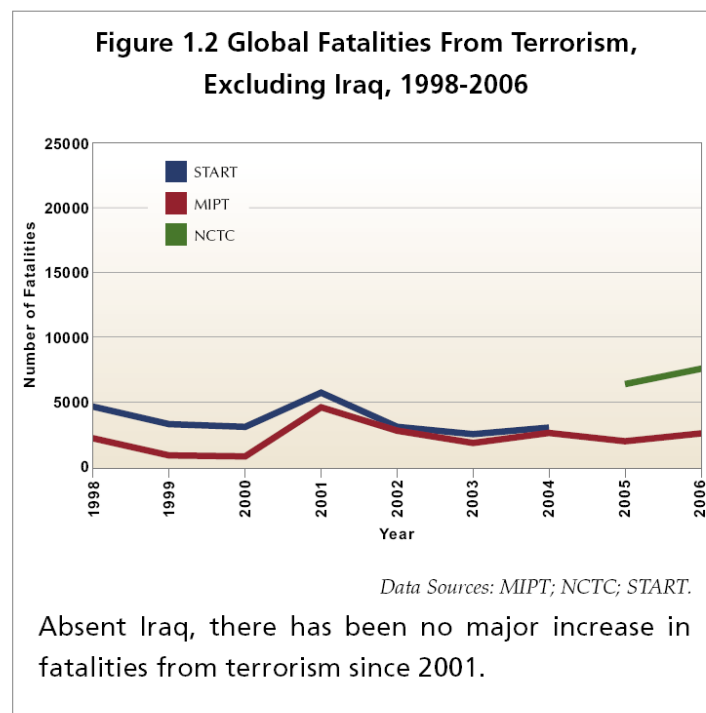
- First, the intentional killing of civilians in wartime is not normally described as “terrorism”, but as a “war crime” or “crime against humanity”. However, both MIPT and START (as well as NCTC) depart from this traditional practice by counting civilian deaths in the civil war in Iraq as terrorism.
- Second, the counting procedures that MIPT and START rely on aren't used consistently. Both count thousands of civilians killed in Iraq's civil war as victims of terrorism, but only a handful of the civilians intentionally killed in sub-Saharan Africa's bloody civil wars. MIPT, for example, estimates that there are more than 2,000 “terrorism” fatalities in Iraq in 2004, but none in Sudan where hundreds, if not thousands, of civilians were deliberately slaughtered by the *janjaweed* and other armed groups during that year.

“It's not clear what explains the inconsistencies,” says Andrew Mack, director of the Human Security Report Project, “but it's very clear that they distort the global terrorism trend data.”

Figure 1.1 shows the global trend in fatalities from terrorist violence using data from NCTC, MIPT, and START.



However, the *Brief* argues that there is a strong case for removing the Iraq fatalities from the datasets because of the inconsistencies mentioned above. When this is done, both the MIPT and START trend data show a substantial decline from the fatality peak in 2001.



But even if we accept the idea that killing civilians in civil wars should be called “terrorism” rather than a “war crime”, and even if we include the Iraq data, there has *still* been a major recent decline in the incidence of terrorism—but it doesn’t take place until the second half of 2007.

In December 2007, NCTC released new data that revealed that the combined fatalities from Islamist and non-Islamist terrorism in Iraq had dropped sharply from the middle of the year. By the end of September, terrorism fatalities in Iraq were down by 55 percent—a change that drove the global toll down by 40 percent.

The new data make it clear that *whether or not civilian fatalities in Iraq are included*, the global death toll from terrorism has declined substantially.

The Challenges Confronting the al-Qaeda Terror Network

In the West and much of the rest of the world, the main concern is not with local terrorists fighting over local issues, but with the campaign being waged by al-Qaeda and its loosely-knit global terror network.

Here too, the data reveal a sharp decline, driven by events in Iraq where the Islamist al-Qaeda In Iraq organization suffered a series of humiliating military defeats in 2007. NCTC’s most recent data reveal that fatalities from Islamist terrorism in Iraq dropped by two thirds in the second half of 2007. This in turn drove the global fatality toll down by almost half.

NCTC’s recent data isn’t the only evidence that Islamist terrorism has been declining. The US-based Intelcenter think-tank published a study in mid-2007 that examined the 63 “most significant” attacks launched by al-Qaeda and its affiliates over a period of nearly 10 years. It found that by mid-2007 the number of Islamist attacks had declined by 65 percent from the high point in 2004, and fatalities were down by more than 90 percent—more evidence of a remarkable change that has attracted little public notice.

The Human Security Report Project’s research team has been studying the terrorism trend data for more than five years and Project Director, Andrew Mack, points out that “the reduction in Islamist violence has attracted virtually no notice because the media don’t report attacks that don’t take place.”

While largely unnoticed, the decline isn’t really surprising, Mack says, “Historically, most terrorist campaigns have failed and the Islamists’ slumping popular support in the Muslim world is a now huge liability for the al-Qaeda network.”

Just how little support the terror groups now have is evident from recent opinion surveys:

- Osama bin Laden’s Saudi countrymen have turned “dramatically against him, his organisation of al-Qaeda ... and terrorism itself.” (Terror Free Tomorrow, December 2007, <http://tinyurl.com/2qn75k>)
- Muslim support for attacks against civilians more than halved in five years in four Islamic countries—Lebanon, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia. (Pew Global Attitudes Project, 24 July 2007, <http://tinyurl.com/6e42mo>)
- 100 percent of Iraqis, Sunni as well as Shia, find al-Qaeda In Iraq’s attacks on civilians “unacceptable”. (ABCNews/BBC/NHK, 10 September 2007, <http://tinyurl.com/6ovyu>)
- Just 1 percent of Afghans feel “strong support” for the presence of the Taliban and jihadi fighters in their country. (ABC News/BBC, 7 December 2006, <http://tinyurl.com/64clvu>)

- In the northwest of Pakistan where al-Qaeda has a strong presence, Osama bin Laden's popularity dropped from 70 percent in August 2007 to just 4 percent in January 2008. (Terror Free Tomorrow, February 2008, <http://tinyurl.com/2hlqk5>)
- In the 2008 national elections in Pakistan, Islamist parties received a mere 2 percent of the vote—a five-fold decline from their 2002 result. (Election Commission of Pakistan, <http://tinyurl.com/55kwzo>)
- Asked if they would vote for al-Qaeda if they could, just 1 percent of Pakistanis said yes. (Terror Free Tomorrow, February 2008, <http://tinyurl.com/2hlqk5>)

What Has Driven the Change

Professor Mack argues that the decline in popular support is driven by the growing Muslim rejection of the extremist ideology and harshly repressive policies of the Islamists. “But the issue that has caused most anger,” he says, “has been the terror groups’ gratuitous and indiscriminate violence against their co-religionists.”

The collapse in public support and the humiliating defeats the Islamists have suffered in Iraq and elsewhere have also generated increasingly bitter divisions within ranks of the terror network.

Meanwhile the growing Muslim antipathy to the Islamist terror groups has meant that increasing numbers of individuals are willing to cooperate with official counter-terror campaigns—as Sunni insurgents in Iraq did when they partnered with their former American enemies to defeat their one-time allies in al-Qaeda in Iraq.

“The strategic importance of this change cannot be underestimated.” Mack argues, “Terrorist campaigns that lose public support on such a scale and so quickly will, sooner or later, be either defeated or abandoned.”

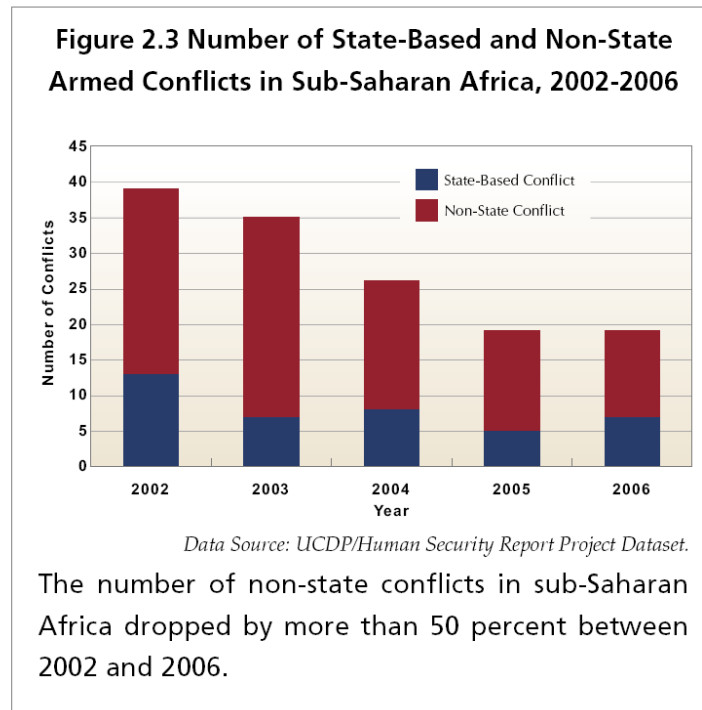
Al-Qaeda and its affiliates are far from being eliminated, but the strategic outlook for the terror network is bleak. By deeply alienating the very publics whose support is critical to their cause, the Islamists have become their own worst enemies and created conditions that will likely bring about their eventual demise.

PART II: Towards a New Peace in Africa?

In the 1990s, sub-Saharan Africa was the world's most war-torn region; in the new millennium it has become much more peaceful. Data from Uppsala University's Conflict Data Program show that:

- Between 1999 and 2006 the number of “state-based” conflicts in the region (i.e., those in which a government is one of the warring parties) had dropped by more than half. The number of battle-deaths had shrunk to just 2 percent of the 1999 toll—an extraordinary decline.
- There has also been, as Figure 2.3 illustrates, a remarkable decline in “non-state” conflicts (i.e., inter-communal and other conflicts in which a government is *not* one of the warring parties). These conflicts, which have been almost completely ignored by the major dataset compilers, more than halved in number between 2002—the first year for which we have data—and 2006, while their annual death toll dropped by more than 70 percent.
- A third type of political violence involves, not combat, but the killing of defenseless civilians by governments or rebel groups. Here too there has been a positive change. Campaigns of “one-sided violence” against civilians declined by two thirds between 2002 and 2006; their death toll dropped by more than 80 percent.

- Coups d’etat numbers have also declined. Although sub-Saharan Africa retains the dubious distinction of being the world’s most coup-prone region, the average number of coups per year has fallen some 40 percent since the 1980s.



What Accounts For The Decline?

The *Brief* argues that the remarkable outbreak of peace across much of sub-Saharan Africa has little to do with conflict prevention (i.e., stopping wars before they start). Preventive diplomacy confronts many challenges and is talked about more than it is practiced, while long-term prevention strategies that seek to address the “root causes” of armed conflict are too slow-acting to explain the sharp recent reduction in political violence in the region. This is bad news for the UN where the idea that “prevention is better than cure” has become widely endorsed.

The most compelling explanations for the reduction in the number and deadliness of conflicts across the region stresses the importance of “peacemaking”—the term the UN uses for initiatives to end wars via negotiated peace agreements—and “post-conflict peacebuilding”.

“Peacebuilding” is the term used to describe the complex and often confused process involving the UN, other international agencies, regional organizations, donor governments and hundreds of NGOs, in a multi-stakeholder effort to help countries recover from civil war. Its critical security role is preventing conflicts that have ended from restarting.

In the early 1990s, there was a major increase in the number of negotiated settlements, but most quickly relapsed into violence, in part because the agreements were often poorly drafted and in part because they received little or no international support. But in the new millennium, not one peace settlements has broken down thus far—almost certainly because they are both better conceived and are now receiving far more effective peacebuilding support from the international community.

Critics have been quick to point to the many failed efforts at post-conflict peacebuilding in Africa, but they have tended to ignore the successes and the fact that the *net* effect of this upsurge of activism has clearly been positive.

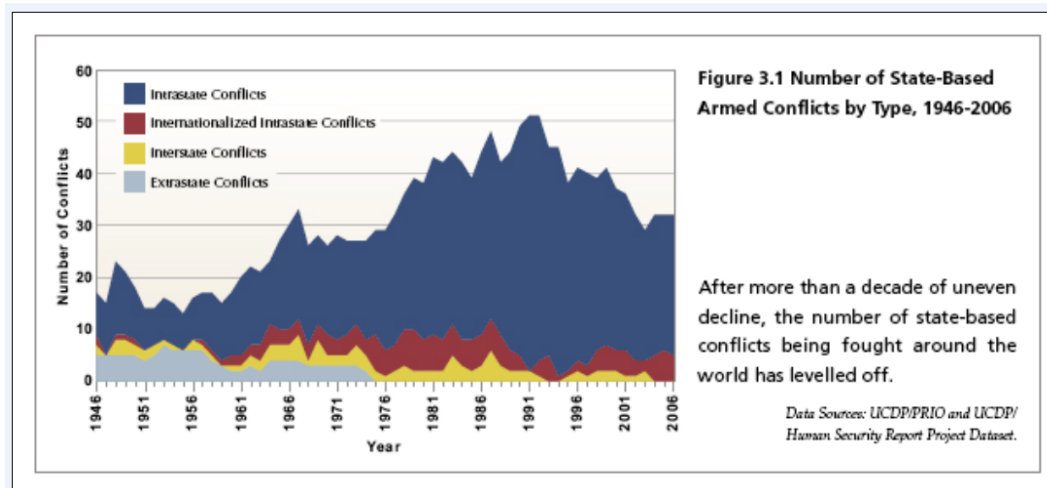
Indeed the combination of peacemaking and peacebuilding initiatives in the region provides the single most compelling explanation for the remarkable recent decline in political violence.

In 1999, the *Economist* reported that, “from north to south, east to west, large swathes of the continent are at war, but almost all efforts at pacification have come to naught.” By the end of 2006 this was clearly no longer true. In the new millennium, peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts in Africa had a remarkably successful track record.

PART III: Global Trends in Human Insecurity: An Update

The 2005 *Human Security Report* reported a decline of more than 40 percent in state-based conflicts between 1992 and 2003, with the numbers of the most severe conflicts and genocides dropping even more sharply.

The *Brief* tracks the rise and subsequent fall in the number of “state-based” armed conflicts (i.e. those in which a government is one of the warring parties). It also shows how the conflict total has recently leveled out.



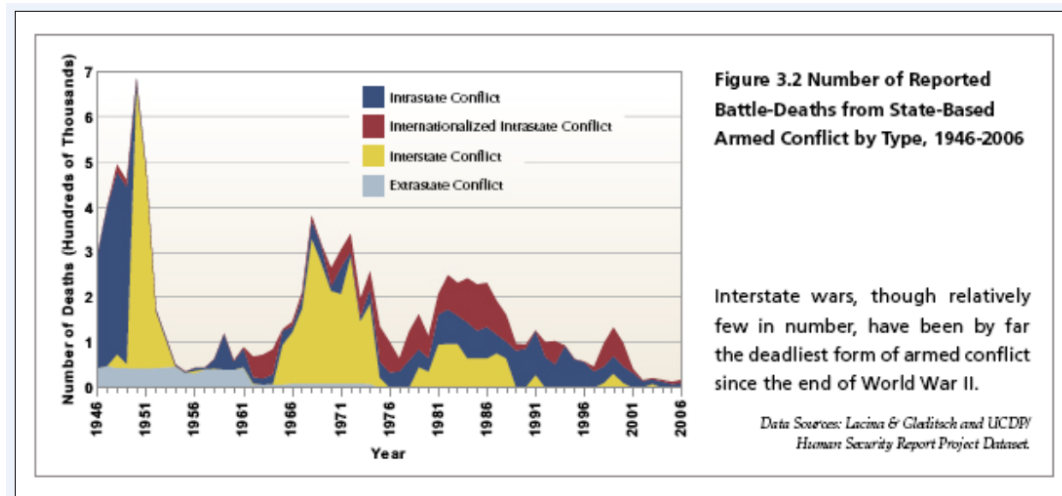
However, the absence of change at the global level conceals important regional shifts in the period between 2002 and 2006, with increased numbers of state-based conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa, and Central and South Asia offsetting the big decrease in sub-Saharan Africa.

While the total number of state-based conflicts being waged around the world has leveled off, the number of non-state conflicts dropped 33 percent worldwide from 2002 to 2006—a change driven mostly by the major decline in political violence in sub-Saharan Africa noted earlier. When state-based and non-state conflict numbers are combined, we find that the global conflict total has declined by some 18 percent—from 68 in 2002 to 56 in 2006.

Campaigns of one-sided violence against civilians have also declined. Their numbers are down from 38 in the peak year of 2004, to 26 in 2006—a decline of 32 percent.

Fatalities

When we examine the numbers of people killed in state-based conflicts around the world we find a pattern of deep but very uneven decline since the early 1950s.



The average number of individuals killed per conflict per year is the best measure we have for the deadliness of wars. Here the decline has been significant. The average conflict killed some 38,000 people in 1950; in 2006 the figure was just over 500. The data, in other words, reveal that wars are not only less numerous than they were in previous decades, they are also far less deadly.

Between 2005 and 2006 there was a modest increase in battle-deaths from both state-based and non-state conflict. But between 2002 and 2006 the combined death toll from both types of conflict decreased by 15 percent.

The one-sided violence fatality statistics are the least reliable—governments and rebels rarely admit to killing civilians. However, fatalities appear to have been trending downwards since the huge death toll in Rwanda in 1994, despite a small increase in reported deaths in 2006.

Human Rights Violations

Measuring human rights violations is both difficult and controversial, but without trend data, human rights organizations, governments and international agencies have no idea whether rights abuses are getting better or worse.

The *Brief* draws on data from the Political Terror Scale (PTS) to map trends in rights violations around the world. The PTS ranks countries on a five-level scale using data from Amnesty International and the US State Department. The higher the ranking, the worse the human rights abuse. The data reveal that the three regions with the worst human rights records for the period 1980-2006 are sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and Central and South Asia. Europe, the Americas, and East and Southeast Asia and Oceania perform best. But the greatest difference in respect for human rights isn't between regions but between rich and poor countries with the latter suffering the worst rights violations by far.

Conclusion

The recent changes recorded in this *Brief* are grounds for cautious optimism.

First, the analysis of the global terrorism data suggests that the pessimism that pervades the expert

consensus is misplaced. In fact, the evidence suggests there has been a decline in the global death toll from terrorist violence. And with respect to Islamist terrorism, the forces that have driven this decline appear to be getting stronger, not weaker.

Second, the ending of more than half of sub-Saharan Africa's armed conflicts in the new millennium provides more evidence that UN-led peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts are not only effective in stopping wars, but can also help prevent them from restarting again.

Third, both conflict numbers and combat fatalities continue to exhibit an encouraging downward trend.

But with more than 50 armed conflicts still being waged around the world, there are clearly no grounds for complacency.

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The Brief can be downloaded from www.humansecuritybrief.info

The Human Security Brief 2007 was funded by the governments of Canada, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK. Its findings should not be taken to represent the views of these or any other government, or of the UN or any other agency.

Professor Andrew Mack is Director of the Human Security Report Project at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada, and a faculty member of the university's new School for International Studies. He previously directed the Human Security Centre at the University of British Columbia where the Project was located until its move to Simon Fraser University in May 2007. He was Director of the Strategic Planning Unit in the Executive Office of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan 1998-2001. He has held research and teaching posts at the Australian National University, Harvard, the London School of Economics, and the University of California, and in Denmark, Hawaii and Japan. His career has included periods as a pilot in the UK's Royal Air Force, as a meteorologist in Antarctica, as a diamond prospector in Sierra Leone and as a journalist with the BBC.

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