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alert 2024!

Report on conflicts,
human rights
and peacebuilding

Icaria editorial

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Authors:
Iván Navarro Milián
Josep Maria Royo Aspa
Jordi Urgell García
Pamela Urrutia Arestizábal
Ana Villellas Ariño
María Villellas Ariño

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This report was written by:
Iván Navarro Milián, Josep Maria Royo Aspa, Jordi Urgell García, Pamela Urrutia Arestizábal, Ana Villellas Ariño and María Villellas Ariño.

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Escola de Cultura de Pau
Edifici B13
Carrer de Vila Puig
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
08193 Bellaterra (Spain)
Phone: +34 93 581 14 14
Email: pr.conflictes.escolapau@uab.cat
Web: http://escolapau.uab.cat

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Executive Summary

Alert 2024! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding is an annual report analyzing the state of the world in terms of conflict and peacebuilding based on three main axes: armed conflict, tensions, gender and peace and security. The analysis of the most relevant events in 2023 and the nature, causes, dynamics, actors and consequences of the main scenarios of armed conflict and social and political tension around the world allows for a regional comparative vision and also allows identifying global trends and elements of risk and preventive warnings for the future. Furthermore, the report also identifies peacebuilding opportunities or opportunities to scale down, prevent or resolve conflicts. In both cases, one of the main objectives in this report is to make available all the information, analyses and identification of warning factors and peace opportunities for decision-makers, those intervening for the peaceful resolution to conflicts, or those giving a greater political, media or academic visibility to the many situations of political and social violence in the world.

As for the methodology, the contents of this report mainly draw on a qualitative analysis of studies and information made available by many sources –the United Nations, international organizations, research centres, communication media or NGOs, among others– as well as on field research in conflict-affected countries.

Some of the most relevant conclusions and information in the *Alert 2024!* report are listed below:

- In 2023, 36 armed conflicts were recorded, the highest number since 2014.

- Five new cases were considered armed conflicts in 2023 –Ethiopia (Amhara), Somalia (Somaliland –SSC Khatumo), DRC (west), Sudan and Israel-Hezbollah – while another case ceased to be considered an armed conflict in 2023 –Ethiopia (Tigray).

- The vast majority of cases continued to be concentrated in Africa (18) and Asia and the Pacific (nine), followed by the Middle East (six), Europe (two) and the Americas (one).

- 47% of armed conflicts were of high intensity, characterized by high levels of lethality –over a thousand fatalities annually–, in addition to serious impacts on the population, massive forced displacements and severe consequences on the territory.

- The 17 high-intensity armed conflicts in 2023 were: Ethiopia (Amhara), Ethiopia (Oromiya), Mali, Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram), Western Sahel Region, DRC (East), DRC (East-ADF), Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Myanmar, Pakistan, Russia-Ukraine, Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Syria and Yemen.

- Regarding the evolution of armed conflicts, 42% of cases worsened in 2023.

- According to UNHCR, in the first half of 2023 the global figure for forced displacement amounted to 110 million people. Of this total, 36.4 million people were refugees, 62.5 million were internally displaced, 6.1 million were counted as asylum seekers and another 5.3 million were in the category of people in need of international protection.

- Regarding the refugee population and in need of international protection, in mid-2023 more than half (52%) came from just three countries affected by armed conflicts: Syria (6.5 million people), Afghanistan (6.1 million) and Ukraine (5.9 million).

- In 2023, conflicts and violence motivated internal population movements of more than 20 million people in 45 countries and territories. Sudan, DRC and Palestine account for almost two-thirds of this total.

- During 2023, 114 socio-political crises were identified around the world, six more than in 2022, in line with the upward trend in the number of cases that has been recorded in recent years.

- Africa and Asia and the Pacific were the regions with the highest number of socio-political crises (38 and 33 respectively), followed by the Americas (20), Europe (13) and the Middle East (10).

- Half of the socio-political crises (49%) worsened in 2023 (49%).

- Approximately almost a quarter of the tensions (23%) were international: Eritrea-Ethiopia; DRC-Rwanda; Venezuela-Guyana; Afghanistan-Pakistan; China-Japan; China-Taiwan; China-Philippines; North Korea-USA, Japan, South Korea; North Korea-South Korea; India-China; Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno Karabakh); and Iran-USA, Israel.

- 23 of the 36 armed conflicts that took place throughout 2023 occurred in countries where there were low or medium-low levels of gender equality. Furthermore, 46 of the 114 active tensions during the year 2023 occurred in countries in which low or medium-low levels of equality existed.

- The UN Secretary-General's annual report on conflict-related sexual violence identified 49 armed actors who were credibly suspected of having committed or being responsible for rape or other forms of sexual violence in contexts of armed conflict.

- For the second year, there was a decline in the participation of women in peace processes, according to the UN.

- 33% of the peace agreements signed in 2022 (6 of the 18 agreements reached that year) included clauses referring to women, girls or gender.

- Alert 2024! report identifies five opportunities for peace in Ethiopia-Egypt-Sudan (Nile Basin); Senegal; Thailand; Cyprus; and in relation to the United Nations Future Summit and a new Peace agenda.

- The report highlights five risk scenarios in Rwanda; Sudan; China – Philippines; Europe; and Gaza.

Structure

The report has five chapters. The first two look at conflicts globally –causes, types, dynamics, evolution and actors in situations of armed conflict or tension. The third chapter looks at the gender impacts in conflicts and tensions, as well as the initiatives being carried out within the United Nations and other local and international organizations and movements with regards to peacebuilding from a gender perspective. Chapter four identifies peace opportunities, scenarios where there is a context that is favourable to resolution of conflicts or to progress towards or consolidate peace initiatives. The final chapter studies risk scenarios in the future. Besides these five chapters, the report also includes a foldable map identifying the scenarios of armed conflict and social-political crises.

In 2023, 36 conflict contexts were recorded, the highest number since 2014

Armed conflicts

The first chapter (Armed conflicts)[1] describes the evolution, type, causes and dynamics in active conflicts during the year; global and regional trends in armed conflicts in 2023 are analyzed, as well as the impacts of such conflicts on the civilian population.

In 2023, 36 conflict contexts were recorded, the highest number since 2014. In 2022, 33 cases had been recorded, 32 in 2021 and 34 between 2018 and 2020. Five new cases were considered as armed conflicts in 2023. In Ethiopia's Amhara region, the federal government's decision to disarm and dissolve the Fano paramilitary militias to integrate them into the Ethiopian Army and the Ethiopian police led to serious clashes between these militias and government forces. In the Horn of Africa, hostilities between the security forces of Somaliland, a self-proclaimed independent region of Somalia whose status remains a matter of dispute, and militias of the Khatumo region, which seeks to become a new state within Somalia, even though it is part of Somaliland, escalated significantly in early 2023 and remained active throughout the year. Meanwhile, in the western part of the DRC, the conflict between the Teke and Yaka communities over land ownership that had begun the previous year in the province of Mai-Ndombe worsened and the violence spread to several neighbouring provinces in 2023. A new armed conflict broke out in Sudan, mainly pitting the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) against the paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The eruption of violence starting in April ended up spreading to a large part of the country and especially to the regions of Darfur, Kordofan and Blue Nile, where local armed groups became actively involved in the hostilities. Therefore, the armed conflicts in these Sudanese regions, which were previously analysed separately in this report, are analysed together in this edition as part of the broader conflict in Sudan. The last new conflict took place in the Middle East, where intensifying tensions caused by the crisis in Gaza opened an especially significant front around the border between Israel and Lebanon. The increase in the magnitude, frequency and scope of the hostilities between Israeli and Hezbollah forces and the impacts of the violence prompted its classification as an armed conflict in late 2023. On the other hand, there was also an armed conflict that ended in 2023: Ethiopia (Tigray). The significant reduction in violence, the withdrawal of local armed groups and foreign forces and the effective disarmament of combatants after the peace agreement was signed between the federal government of Ethiopia and the political and military authorities of Tigray in November 2022 led us to stop considering this case an armed conflict in 2023.

As for the geographical distribution of the armed conflicts in 2023, the vast majority continued to be concentrated in Africa (18) and Asia and the Pacific (nine), followed by the Middle East (six), Europe (two) and the Americas (one).

These various armed conflicts were of an internal, internationalised internal and/or international nature. Although most armed conflicts continued to be

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1. In this report, an armed conflict is understood as any confrontation between regular or irregular armed groups with objectives that are perceived as incompatible, in which the continuous and organised use of violence: a) causes a minimum of 100 fatalities in a year and/or has a serious impact on the territory (destruction of infrastructure or of natural resources) and on human safety (e.g., injured or displaced people, sexual violence, food insecurity, impact on mental health and on the social fabric or the disruption of basic services); and b) aims to achieve objectives different from those of common crime normally related to:
   - demands for self-determination and self-government or identity-related aspirations;
   - opposition to the political, economic, social or ideological system of a state or the internal or international policy of a government, which in both triggers a struggle to seize or undermine power;
   - the control of resources or land.

Armed conflicts in 2023*

AFRICA (18)	ASIA (9)	MIDDLE EAST (6)
Burundi -2015-	Afghanistan -2001-	Egypt (Sinai) -2014-
Cameroon (Ambazonia/North West and South West) -2018-	India (CPI-M) -1967-	Iraq -2003-
CAR -2006-	India (Jammu & Kashmir) -1989	Israel – Hezbollah –2023-
DRC (east) -1998-	Myanmar -1948-	Israel – Palestine -2000-
DRC (east-ADF) -2014-	Pakistan -2001-	Syria -2011-
DRC (west) -2023-	Pakistan (Balochistan) -2005-	Yemen -2004-
Ethiopia (Amhara) -2023-	Philippines (NPA) -1969-	**EUROPE (2)**
Ethiopia (Oromia) -2022-	Philippines (Mindanao) -1991-	Türkiye (south-east) -1984-
Ethiopia (Tigray) -2020-	Thailand (south) -2004-	Russia – Ukraine -2022-
Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram) - 2011-		
Libya -2011-		**AMERICA (1)**
Mali -2012-		
Mozambique (north) -2019-		Colombia -1964-
Somalia -1988-		
Somalia (Somaliland – SSC Khatumo) -2023-		
South Sudan -2009-		
Sudan -2023-		
Western Sahel Region -2018-		

* The start date of the armed conflict is shown between hyphens

internationalised internal ones, following the trend of previous years, the number of internal and international conflicts increased in 2023. Seventeen per cent of the armed conflicts were considered internal in 2023, more than in the previous year. Whereas there were four conflicts of this type in 2022, there were six in 2023. Five armed conflicts were international in nature. This was also more than in previous periods, climbing from three in 2022 to five in 2023. The rest of the cases (equivalent to 69%, or 25 of 36) were internationalised internal in nature. There were significantly less of these than in previous years, as they accounted for 79% of the armed conflicts in 2022 and 81% in 2021. Though part of the dynamics of these armed conflicts are internal, some of the warring parties are foreign, the armed actors in the conflict have bases or launch attacks from abroad and/or the fighting has spilled over to neighbouring countries. In many conflicts, this internationalisation involved third parties as combatants, including international missions, ad-hoc regional and international military coalitions, states, cross-border armed groups, international private security companies and others.

The multi-causal nature of contemporary armed conflicts was confirmed in 2023. Following the trend of previous years, the main causes of most of the conflicts (26 of the 36, equivalent to 72%) included questioning of the political, economic, social or ideological system of the state and/or disputes about the domestic or international policies of the respective governments. In line with recent trends, disputes about the system drove 19 of the 36 armed conflicts (53%) in 2023. In most cases, they were related to jihadist armed actors with political agendas based on their particular interpretation of Islamic law. These groups include Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region, the Pakistani Taliban's TTP militias and the

different groups that have claimed to be branches and/or "provinces" of ISIS beyond its area of origin in Iraq and Syria, in places such as the Lake Chad region, Somalia, Libya, Egypt (Sinai), Afghanistan, Pakistan, Pakistan (Balochistan), the Philippines (Mindanao) and Yemen. In Libya, Egypt (Sinai) and the Philippines (Mindanao), these groups' operations have fallen significantly compared to previous years. In three other cases (Colombia, the Philippines (NPA) and India (CPI-M)), disputes about the system were associated with other kinds of insurgencies, ideologically linked to communism and Maoism. Fourteen of the 36 armed conflicts (39%) were caused by the domestic or international policies of the respective governments, leading to struggles to erode or access power. One such case was the armed conflict in Libya, which continued to feature power struggles between rival governments. Others included the conflicts in the CAR, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

Armed conflicts were also primarily caused by disputes over identity and/or demands for self-government. These were behind 21 of the 36 armed conflicts in 2023, or 58%. In line with previous years, identity-related disputes were more significant than demands for self-government, as the former were identified in 22 conflicts (61% of the total), compared to 14 for the latter (39%). Identity-related aspirations were relevant in new armed conflicts in Africa in 2023. For example, they were linked to Amhara nationalist claims in Ethiopia, to the interest of the SSC-Khatumo administration to become a new state of Somalia as part of the historical dispute over border regions between Somaliland and Puntland and to the clashes and power struggles between the Teke and Yaka communities in the DRC (west). Other armed conflicts related to self-government and/or identity took place in Cameroon (Ambazonia/North West

and South West), Ethiopia (Oromia), Ethiopia (Tigray), Mali, Mozambique (north), the Western Sahel region, the DRC (east), Sudan, the Philippines (Mindanao), India (Jammu and Kashmir), Myanmar, Pakistan (Balochistan), Thailand (south), Türkiye (south-east), Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Syria and Yemen.

Finally, many armed conflicts were mainly caused by control of territory and/or resources. These factors were identified in 15 of the 36 conflicts (42%). Between the two, struggles for resources were more important, as they were behind one third (33%) of the armed conflicts in 2023. In line with previous years, the conflicts that involved disputes over resources mainly took place in Africa, though this factor also had an indirect effect in many conflicts in other regions, perpetuating violence through war economies. Throughout 2023, disputes around these issues were relevant in the conflict in the Lake Chad region, Libya, DRC (west), CAR or Pakistan (Balochistan).

Regarding the evolution of armed conflicts in 2023, 42% of the cases worsened. The armed conflicts that got worse were in Africa (Burundi, Ethiopia (Amhara), Mali, the Western Sahel region, the DRC (east), the DRC (west), Somalia, Somalia (Somaliland – SCC-Khatumo) and Sudan), in Asia (Myanmar, Pakistan and Pakistan (Balochistan)) and in the Middle East (Israel-Palestine, Israel-Hezbollah and Syria). In some conflicts, an escalation of violence put an end to ceasefire agreements that had been in force for years. In Mali, the ceasefire had lasted years and in Pakistan it was broken after several months. The rest of the armed conflicts were split more or less evenly between those with levels of hostilities and violence similar to those in 2022 (10 conflicts, equivalent to 28%) and those with comparatively lower levels (11 conflicts, accounting for 30%). In some of the conflicts that saw less fighting, the trend was linked to some armed actors' apparent weakening and decline in activity as a result of the dynamics of the hostilities. This was true of the conflict in Mozambique (north), where there was a notable drop in the associated death toll and in the number of attacks targeting civilians, but also in the Philippines (Mindanao) and Egypt (Sinai). In other conflicts, the decrease in fighting was linked to the impact of negotiating processes and peace or ceasefire agreements, such as in Ethiopia (Tigray), which was no longer considered an armed conflict in 2023 due to the course of events after the peace agreement was signed in November 2022, and in Yemen, where the ceasefire agreement signed in 2022 was de facto maintained and negotiating channels remained active between the main actors involved in the hostilities.

Regarding the intensity of armed conflicts in 2023, 47% of the cases were of high intensity, characterised by high levels of lethality (over 1,000 fatalities per year), in addition to serious impacts on the population,

Regarding the evolution of armed conflicts in 2023, 42% of the cases worsened

Regional distribution of the number of armed conflicts in 2023
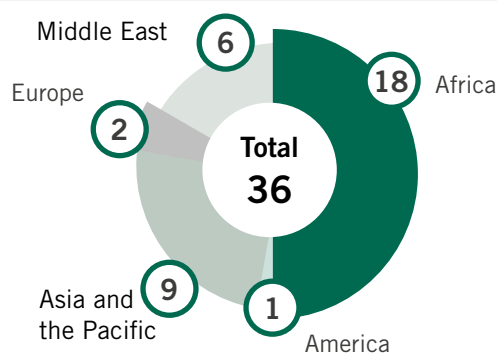
mass forced displacement and severe consequences on the ground. Of the rest of the cases, 17% were of medium intensity and 36% of low intensity. If we consider the data since 2011, high-intensity armed conflicts once accounted for less than one third of all conflicts worldwide, except in 2016 and 2017, when they stood at 40%. Since 2020, the percentage of high-intensity conflicts around the world has increased, reaching around half the total: 47% in 2020, 53% in 2021, 52% in 2022 and 47% in 2023. The highest percentage of cases of this type was concentrated in Africa (which hosted 10 of the 17 high-intensity armed conflicts), followed by the Middle East (four cases), Asia (two) and Europe (one). The 17 high-intensity armed conflicts in 2023 were: Ethiopia (Amhara), Ethiopia (Oromia), Mali, Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram), Western Sahel region, DRC (East), DRC (East-ADF), Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Myanmar, Pakistan, Russia-Ukraine, Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Syria and Yemen. As in previous years, some of the high-intensity armed conflicts presented a pattern of hostilities and dynamics of violence that cost well above the threshold of a thousand lives per year, in addition to other serious impacts on human security and repercussions on infrastructure and on the ground. Some of the examples that, according to some estimates, would have suffered higher levels of mortality associated with war hostilities were the cases of Israel-Palestine –with more than 34,000 fatalities in just three months–, Russia-Ukraine –more than 30,000– , Myanmar –more than 15,000–, Sudan or the Western Sahel region –more than 13,000 in each case–, Somalia –almost 8,000–, Syria –more than 6,000–, Mali –more than 4,000–, or Yemen and DRC – with more than 3,000.

The civilian population continued to suffer very serious consequences from the armed conflicts in 2023. The impacts of the armed conflicts were also interrelated with other crises, such as the climate emergency, food insecurity and inequality, aggravating the violations of rights and the general situation of human security in these contexts. The annual report of the UN Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, published in May 2023 and analysing

Countries with the highest numbers of internal displacements due to conflict and violence in 2023
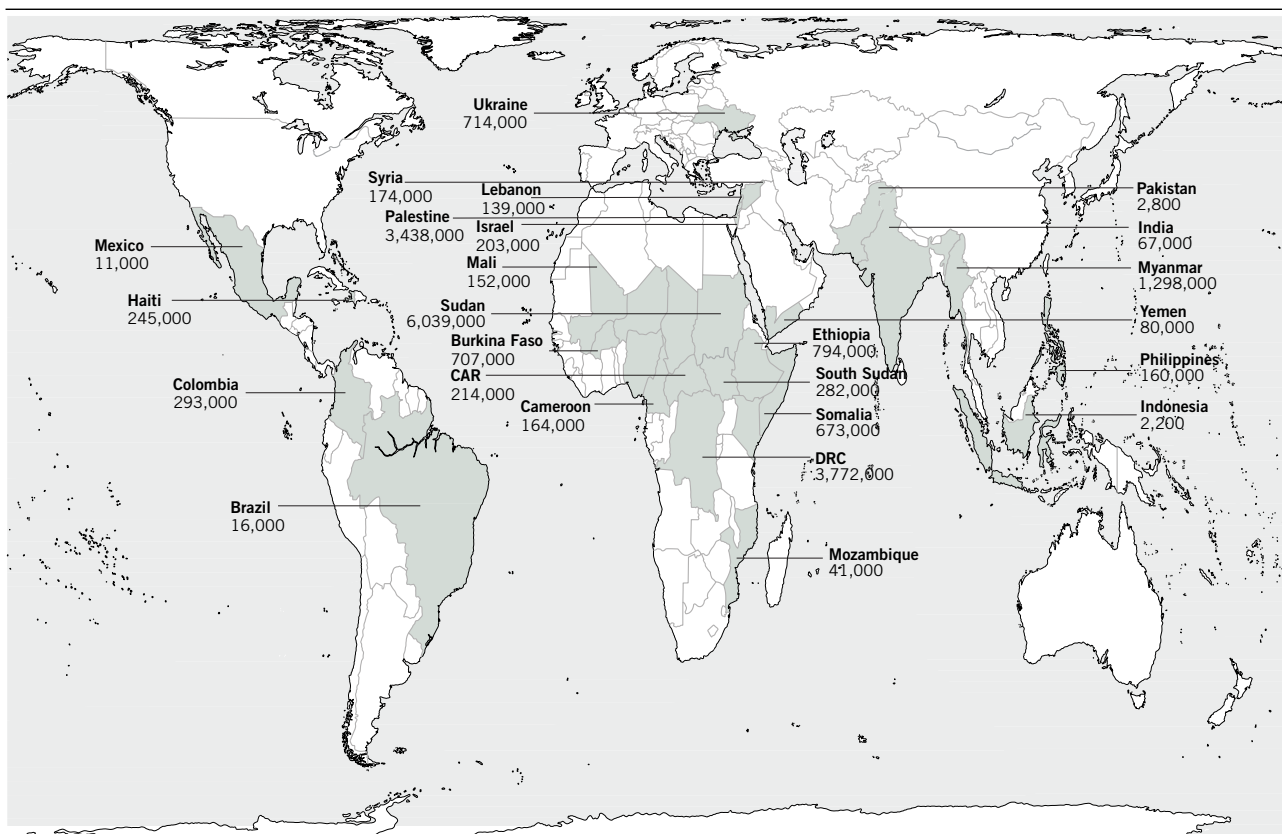
Source: Map prepared by the authors on the basis of the data provided in Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2024,* 14 May, 2024.

the events of 2022, confirmed the consequences that death, injury, forced disappearance, torture, rape and forced displacement had for civilians. The report also asserted that the destruction of essential health, power, sanitation and water infrastructure deprived many thousands of people of access to basic services to survive. The report also warned of the impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, with devastating effects on the civilian population. Thus, the highest number of civilian victims from these weapons in 2022 were in Ukraine, followed by Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria. The use of antipersonnel mines was also documented in the conflicts in the CAR, Colombia, the DRC, Myanmar, Ukraine and Yemen, and cluster bombs were used in Ukraine. The armed conflicts also continued to have specific impacts on some population groups. In his periodic reports on the consequences of conflicts on civilians, the UN Secretary-General warned of the disproportionate effects suffered by older people, who often cannot leave areas affected by hostilities and are forced to face increased risk of death, injury or lack of access to basic services or support networks. The UN Secretary-General's periodic report on children and armed conflict published in mid-2023, covering events in 2022, noted a rise in the number of serious violations against boys and girls. While 23,982 serious violations had been confirmed in 2021, 27,180 were documented in 2022, 24,300 of which were committed over the course of 2022 and 2,880 had been perpetrated before, but were finally verified in 2022. These

violations affected nearly 19,000 minors, most of which were boys, in 24 contexts. The report asserts that the information provided does not reflect all the violations committed against boys and girls in armed conflicts worldwide, but it does outline the trends of the most serious violations. Therefore, the most serious violations committed against boys and girls included murder, mutilation, recruitment, kidnapping and detention due to their real or imagined connection with armed groups. Gender norms shaped the minors' exposure to these impacts. As such, boys continued to be most affected by recruitment, mutilation and abduction, while girls were disproportionately affected by sexual violence related to the armed conflicts.

Forced displacement continued to be one of the most flagrant and dramatic effects of the armed conflicts, compromising the lives of millions of people around the world. According to data gathered by the United Nations agency for refugees (UNHCR), the phenomenon only worsened in 2023, once again breaking record numbers. In the first half of 2023, 110 million people had been forcibly displaced inside or outside the borders of their countries as a result of conflicts, violence, persecution and human rights violations. Of this total, 36.4 million people were refugees, 62.5 million were internally displaced, 6.1 million were asylum seekers and another 5.3 million were categorised as people in need of international protection. In mid-2023, more than half (52%) the world's refugees came from just

three countries torn by armed conflict: Syria (6.5 million people), Afghanistan (6.1 million) and Ukraine (5.9 million). Syria continued to have the largest refugee and internally displaced populations, as it has for a decade, with a total of 13.3 million people. It is estimated that 88% of the total forcibly displaced population worldwide lived in low- and middle-income countries. According to IDMC's annual report, which focuses on the situation of the internally displaced population, by the end of 2023 a total of 68 million people were living in internal displacement due to conflict and violence, a figure that has increased by 49% in the last five years. Conflicts and violence triggered 20 million new internal displacements in 45 countries and territories in 2023. Sudan, DRC and Palestine represent almost two thirds of this total.

As in previous years, sexual violence continued to be perpetrated in many armed conflicts. The annual report of the UN Secretary-General on sexual violence in armed conflicts published in 2023, which documents and analyses events that occurred in 2022, noted some especially worrying trends and warned of the serious effects of the use of sexual violence in Ukraine, Afghanistan, Mali, Myanmar, Sudan, the DRC, Ethiopia, Haiti and South Sudan. The report identified 49 actors as perpetrators of sexual violence in different conflicts, most of them non-state armed groups, although cases involving the national armed forces and security forces were also reported. The report states that 70% of these actors are considered persistent perpetrators, appearing on the list for five years or more and failing to take any corrective or reparatory action. Sexual violence was used as part of political and repressive violence in different armed conflicts and socio-political crises and was one of the causes of forced displacement. In that way, it also affected previous displaced populations given the vulnerability faced by women forced to leave their places of origin.

Half of the socio-political crises identified in 2023 (49%) worsened compared to the previous year and only 23% saw an improvement

Socio-political crises

The second chapter (Socio-political crises)[2] looks at the most relevant events regarding social and political tensions recorded during the year and compares global and regional trends.

There were 114 socio-political crises around the world in 2023, six more than in 2022, in line with the climbing trend in the number of socio-political crises reported in recent years (31 more crises since 2018). Africa and Asia and the Pacific were the regions in the world with the highest number of socio-political crises (38 and 33, respectively), followed by the Americas (20), Europe (13) and the Middle East (10). Thirteen new cases were identified in 2023, concentrated mainly in Africa and the Americas: Ethiopia-Somalia; Gabon; Madagascar; Senegal; Sierra Leone; Togo; Argentina; Panama; Paraguay; Venezuela-Guyana; Afghanistan-Pakistan; China-Philippines; and Russia-USA, NATO, EU. Seven other cases were no longer classified as socio-political crises, most of them in Africa: Central Africa (LRA), Eswatini, Sudan, Somalia (Somaliland-Puntland), India, India (Assam) and Israel-Syria-Lebanon. The socio-political crises in Central Africa (LRA), Eswatini, India and India (Assam) were removed from consideration due to a drop in intensity, whereas those in Sudan, Somalia (Somaliland-Puntland) and Israel-Syria-Lebanon were reclassified as armed conflicts.

For one more year in 2023, one of the most notable aspects of our analysis of the socio-political crises is that half of them (49%) worsened compared to the previous year. In 28% of the socio-political crises there were no observable changes and in 23% the tension eased. This was reflected in part by a rise in the number of high-intensity cases, from 28 in 2022 to 31 in 2023: Chad; Eritrea-Ethiopia; Ethiopia; Kenya; Nigeria; Nigeria (Biafra); DRC; DRC-Rwanda; Tunisia; Ecuador; El Salvador; Haiti; Honduras; Mexico; Peru; Venezuela; Venezuela-Guyana; Afghanistan-Pakistan; China-Japan; China-Taiwan; China-Philippines; North Korea-US, Japan, South Korea; North Korea-South Korea; India (Manipur); India-China; Indonesia (West Papua); Papua New Guinea; Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh); Russia; Iran; and Iran-US, Israel. In addition to the 31 high-intensity cases, which accounted for nearly one third of the total, 39% of the 114 socio-political crises were of low intensity (in 2022 this percentage was 42%) and 33% were of medium intensity (32% in 2022). As such, the trend of 2022 was repeated in 2023, raising the number and average intensity of the socio-political crises. The intensity of the socio-political crises especially rose in Europe (where 85% of cases escalated) and in the Americas (where 75% did so). In the Middle East, 80% of the socio-political crises maintained a dynamic similar to the previous year.

Regarding the main causal factors, the socio-political crises continued to be predominantly multi-causal, with two or more causes identified in 56% of the cases. Opposition to the political, economic, social or ideological system of a State, or to the internal

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2. A socio-political crisis is defined as that in which the pursuit of certain objectives or the failure to satisfy certain demands made by different actors leads to high levels of political, social or military mobilisation and/or the use of violence with a level of intensity that does not reach that of an armed conflict and that may include clashes, repression, coups d'état and bombings or attacks of other kinds, and whose escalation may degenerate into an armed conflict under certain circumstances. Socio-political crises are normally related to: a) demands for self-determination and self-government, or identity issues; b) opposition to the political, economic, social or ideological system of a state, or the internal or international policies of a government, which in both cases produces a struggle to take or erode power; or c) control of resources or territory.

or international policy of a Government, was present in 75% of the crises analyzed; the demands for self-determination and self-government, or identity aspirations were present in 35% of the cases; and control of resources or territory in 31% of the crises. These figures maintain a certain continuity with respect to those of the previous year. In a disaggregated analysis of factors, opposition to the government's internal or international policies was once again the most predominant cause and was present in 69% of the 114 tension scenarios. In this sense, 30 cases were identified in Africa, which is equivalent to 79% of the cases in the region; 19 cases in America, which is equivalent to 95% (only in the case of Venezuela-Guyana it was not present); 14 in Asia and the Pacific (42%); nine in Europe and seven in the Middle East, representing 69% and 70% respectively. The second most prevalent factor was the claim of identity-related aspirations (33%), especially relevant in regions such as Europe (62%) or the Middle East (50%). Next, with very similar percentages, there were issues related to the control of resources (24%), demands for self-determination and self-government (22%), opposition to the political, social or ideological system of the State as a whole (20%) and control of the territory (20%). The different causal factors associated with the socio-political crises also observe a great oscillation between regions. As an example, opposition to the Government was present in 95% of tensions in America, while in Asia and the Pacific they represented 64% of cases. On the other hand, demands for self-determination and/or self-government were present in 15% of cases in America, in 29% in Africa, compared to 62% of cases registered in Europe. Almost half of the cases in Asia and the Pacific were linked (45%) to claims related to control and access to resources and territory.

Approximately half the socio-political tensions worldwide were internal in nature (49%), though with a pronounced geographic variability (90% of the crises in the Americas and 8% in Europe). Nearly one fourth of the crises (23%) were international, but some were among the most intense in the world: Eritrea-Ethiopia; DRC-Rwanda; Venezuela-Guyana; Afghanistan-Pakistan; China-Japan; China-Taiwan; China-Philippines; North Korea-US, Japan, South Korea; North Korea-South Korea; India-China; Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh); and Iran-US, Israel. Finally, over one quarter (28%) of the crises were internationalised internal, meaning that one of the main actors is foreign and/or that the tension extends to the territory of

23 of the 36 armed conflicts that took place in 2023 occurred in countries with low or medium-low levels of gender equality

Regional distribution of the number of socio-political crises in 2023
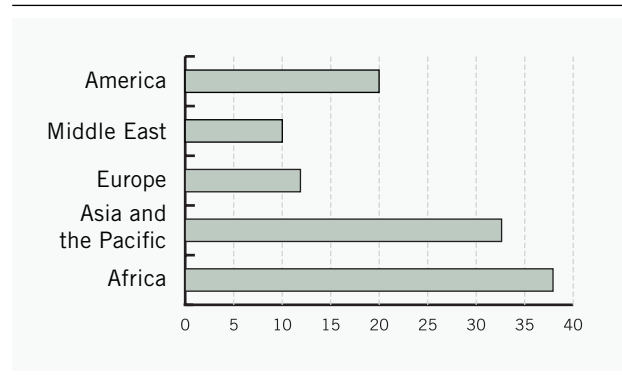
neighbouring countries. Once again, major variations were observed between regions (62% of the crises in Europe were of this type, while only one was reported in Latin American, the socio-political crisis in Ecuador).

Gender, peace and security

Chapter three (Gender, peace and security)[3] analyses the gender-based impacts in conflicts and sociopolitical, as well as the inclusion of the gender perspective into various international and local peacebuilding initiatives by international organisations, especially the United Nations, national governments, as well as different organisations and movements from local and international civil society. In addition, a follow–up is made of the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda. The chapter is structured into three main sections: the first provides an assessment of the global situation with regard to gender inequalities by analysing the Gender Development Index; the second analyses the gender dimension in armed conflicts and socio–political crises; and the final section is devoted to peacebuilding from a gender perspective. At the beginning of the chapter, a map is attached that shows those countries with serious gender inequalities according to the Gender Development Index. The chapter conducts a specific follow–up of the implementation of the agenda on women, peace and security, established after the adoption by the UN Security Council in 2000 of Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

23 of the 36 armed conflicts active throughout 2023 took place in countries with low levels of gender equality (Mali,

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3. As an analytical category, gender makes it clear that inequalities between men and women are the product of social norms rather than a result of nature, and sets out to underline this social and cultural construction to distinguish it from the biological differences of the sexes. The gender perspective aims to highlight the social construction of sexual difference and the sexual division of work and power. It also attempts to show that the differences between men and women are a social construction resulting from unequal power relations that have historically been established in the patriarchal system. The goal of gender as an analytical category is to demonstrate the historical and situated nature of sexual differences. This approach must be accompanied by an intersectional analysis that relates gender to other factors that structure power in a society, such as social class, race, ethnicity, age, or sexuality, among other aspects that generate inequalities, discrimination and privileges.

the Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram), the Western Sahel Region, the DRC (east), the DRC (east-ADF), the DRC (west), Somalia, Somalia (Somaliland-SSC Khatumo), Sudan, Afghanistan, India (Jammu and Kashmir), India (CPI-M), Pakistan, Pakistan (Balochistan), Egypt (Sinai), Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Syria and Yemen) and medium-low gender equality (Cameroon (Ambazonia/North West and South West), Ethiopia (Amhara), Ethiopia (Oromia) and Ethiopia (Tigray). There were no data on the CAR and South Sudan, both countries in which an armed conflict is taking place. Fifteen of the 17 armed conflicts with high-intensity violence in 2023 (88%) took place in countries with low or medium-low levels of gender equality and there were no GDI data for South Sudan. In eight other countries with one or more armed conflicts, levels of discrimination were lower, in some cases with high levels of equality (Libya, Colombia, Thailand, Russia, Ukraine and Israel) or medium levels of equality (Burundi, Mozambique, the Philippines, Myanmar and Türkiye), according to the GDI. Forty-six of the 114 socio-political crises active during 2023 took place in countries with low or medium-low levels of gender equality.

The annual report by the UN Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence identified 49 armed groups which were strongly suspected of having committed or having been responsible for rapes or other forms of sexual violence in armed conflict settings on the agenda of the UN Security Council. Most of the actors identified by the United Nations in its annex were non-state armed actors, although some state armed actors were also identified, across a total of 11 settings (CAR, DRC, Haiti, Iraq, Mali, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria and Nigeria). According to the classification system used by Escola de Cultura de Pau, 10 of the 11 contexts analysed in the UN Secretary-General's report were countries with high-intensity armed conflicts. The report by the UN Secretary-General warned of some worrying trends regarding the use of sexual violence in armed conflicts and said that the situation was deteriorating in Afghanistan, Mali, Myanmar and Sudan, where violent changes in government and coups d'état have jeopardised previous progress made in recognising women's rights and where women have been seriously affected by sexual violence. The report points to worsening patterns in the use of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Haiti and South Sudan.

The UN Secretary-General annual report on women, peace and security stated that in 2022, the year to which the data collected for the report issued in 2023 refers, 614 million women and girls lived in contexts affected by armed conflict. The report indicated that women participated as negotiators or delegates representing the parties in conflict in four of the five UN-facilitated peace processes in 2022. All these peace processes had space for consultation with women's civil society organisations and expert advice on gender was available. However, despite this representation in peace processes led or co-led by the United Nations, there was a decline in participation for the second year in a row, tumbling from 23% in 2020 to 19% in 2021 and 18% in 2022. The report also noted that 33% of the peace agreements signed in 2022 (six of the 18 agreements reached that year) included clauses referring to women, girls or gender.

Countries affected by armed conflict with a medium-low or low level of gender equality

Low level of equality		
Afghanistan	**India (2)** India (Jammu and Kashmir) India (CPI-M)	**Pakistan (2)** Pakistan Pakistan (Balochistan)
Burkina Faso Western Sahel Region	**Mali (2)** Mali Western Sahel Region	**Palestine** Israel-Palestine
Chad Lake Chad Region		**Somalia (2)** Somalia Somalia (Somaliland-SCC Khatumo)
DRC (3) DRC (east) DRC (east-ADF) DRC (west)	**Niger (2)** Lake Chad Region Western Sahel Region	**Sudan**
Egypt Egypt (Sinai)	**Nigeria** Lake Chad Region	**Syria**
Iraq		**Yemen**

Medium-low level of equality		
Cameroon (2) Cameroon (Ambazonia/North West and South West) Lake Chad Region	**Ethiopia (3)** Ethiopia (Amhara) Ethiopia (Oromia) Ethiopia (Tigray)	

Countries affected by socio-political crises with a medium-low or low level of gender equality

Low level of equality		
Afghanistan Afghanistan – Pakistan	**Guinea Bissau**	**Nigeria (3)** Nigeria Nigeria (Biafra) Nigeria (Niger Delta)
Algeria	**India (4)** India (Manipur) India (Nagaland) India – China India – Pakistan	**Pakistan (3)** Pakistan Afghanistan – Pakistan India – Pakistan
Benin		
Burkina Faso	**Iran (4)** Iran Iran (North West) Iran (Sistan and Balochistan) Iran – USA, Israel	**Palestine**
Chad		
Côte D'Ivoire		**Rwanda (3)** Rwanda Rwanda – Burundi RDC – Rwanda
Djibouti	**Iraq** Iraq (Kurdistan)	
DRC (2) DRC DRC – Rwanda	**Mali**	**Sierra Leone**
	Morocco Morocco – Western Sahara	**Sudan – South Sudan**
Egypt (2) Egypt Ethiopia – Egypt – Sudan		**Togo**
	Niger	
Guinea		**Uganda**

Medium-low level of equality		
Bangladesh	**Lao, PDR**	**Uzbekistan (2)** Uzbekistan Uzbekistan (Karakalpakstan)
Ethiopia (5) Ethiopia Ethiopia – Egypt –Sudan Ethiopia – Somalia Ethiopia – Sudan Eritrea – Ethiopia	**Tajikistan (3)** Tajikistan Tajikistan (Gorno-Badakhshan) Kyrgyzstan – Tajikistan	

Opportunities for Peace and Risk Scenarios

Chapter four of the report (Opportunities for Peace) identifies and analyzes five scenarios that are favourable for positive steps to be taken in terms of peacebuilding for the future. The opportunities identified in 2023 refer to different regions and topics:

■ **Egypt – Ethiopia – Sudan:** The Nile River has been at the heart of disputes in the Horn of Africa and East Africa for decades. The construction of the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) in Ethiopia since 2011 has exacerbated the situation and the tension between Ethiopia and Egypt, and to a lesser extent, Sudan. However, direct contacts between the three countries resumed in 2023, which could present an opportunity to begin laying the foundations for resolving this historical dispute. Although the regional context gives little reason for optimism due to the armed conflicts raging in the Ethiopian regions of Oromia and Amhara, the devastating war in Sudan and the reports of ongoing genocide by Israel in Gaza, with

The report identifies and analyzes five scenarios that are favourable for positive steps to be taken in terms of peacebuilding

direct consequences for Egypt, as well as growing tensions among countries in the Horn of Africa, this same deterioration could be an opportunity that pushes these three countries to resolve a dispute that requires their joint cooperation.

■ **Senegal:** After three years of tension between the government of President Macky Sall and the opposition, which set off a major political crisis, Senegal's presidential election on 24 March 2024 was won by opposition leader Bassirou Diomaye Faye. Thus, Senegal seems to have ended one of the most difficult and controversial periods in its political history, paving the way for a new government that faces major political, economic and social challenges.

■ **Thailand:** The resumption of dialogue between the Thai government and the BRN after almost a decade of rule by the military junta (2014-2019) and the government that emerged from it (2019-2023), as well as the drastic drop in violence in
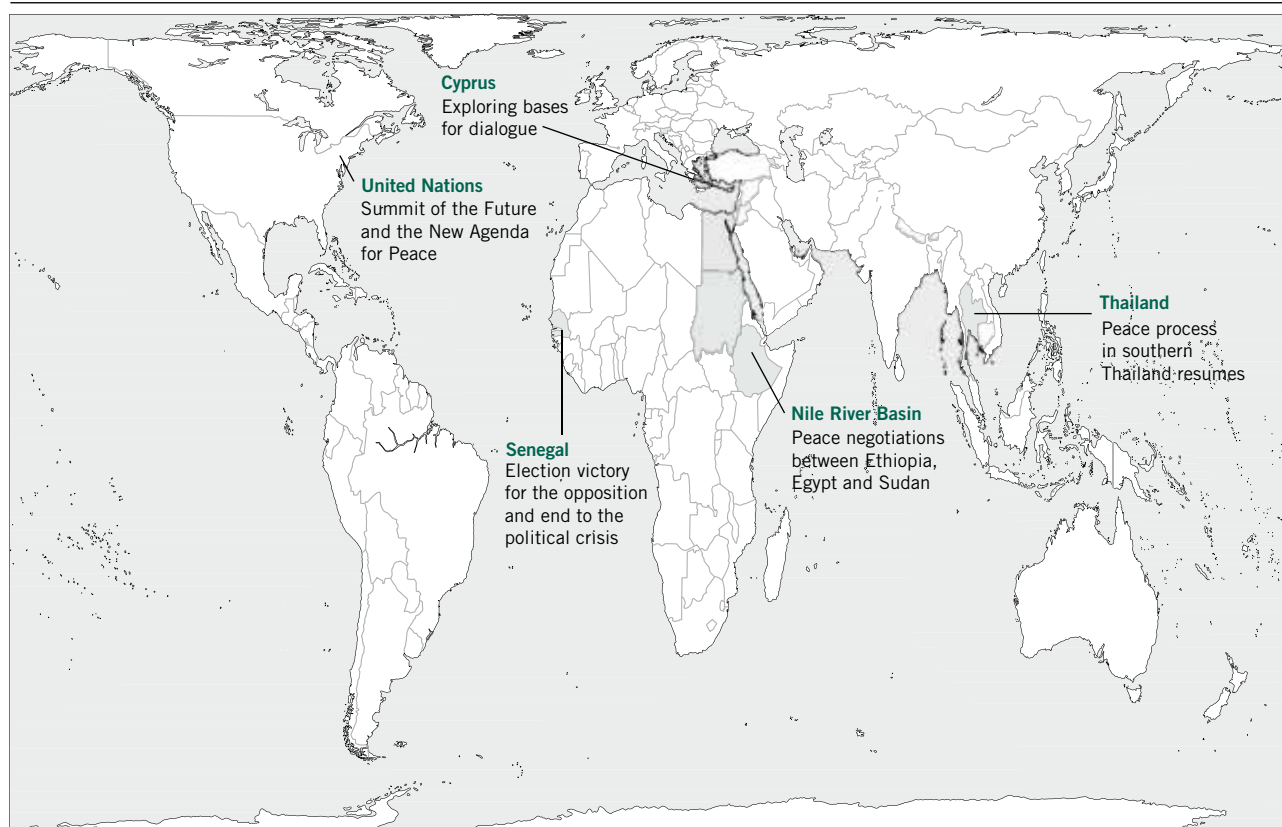
recent years and the establishment of a stable infrastructure for facilitating the dialogue (with Malaysian mediation and international support and observation), all provide some positive prospects for solving the armed conflict through negotiations.

- **Cyprus:** The dispute over the status of the divided island of Cyprus has decades of failed negotiations behind it, the last in 2017. Formal negotiations have not resumed since, and in recent years the gap between both sides' positions has widened and the regional and global contexts have become more militarised and complex. In this thorny situation, some modest opportunities have nevertheless come together, along with the UN Secretary-General's appointment of a personal envoy charged with exploring bases for an agreement to make headway in the process. Other factors include the recent rapprochement between Türkiye and Greece and the civil society actors working consistently to promote dialogue. Despite the many obstacles, local and international actors could make complementary efforts to take advantage of these opportunities that have arisen for rapprochement between the parties.

- **Summit of the Future and New Agenda for Peace:** Given several different global crises (the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the genocide in Gaza and others) and challenges

to multilateralism, the UN Secretary-General proposes an international agenda called the Pact for the Future, which could present an opportunity to give fresh impetus to multilateralism and should be endorsed by the countries attending the Summit of the Future in September 2024. The proposal includes a New Agenda for Peace.

Chapter five of the report (Risk Scenarios), identifies and analyzes five scenarios of armed conflict and tension that, given their condition, may worsen and become sources of more severe instability and violence.

- **Rwanda:** Thirty years after the Rwandan genocide of 1994, which marked African and world history and was one of the international community's greatest failures to fulfil its responsibility to guarantee peace and international security, another episode has broken out in the war rocking the Great Lakes region, pitting the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) against Rwanda through its local proxy ally, currently known as the insurgent group March 23 Movement (M23). The situation could even lead to a direct open conflict between both countries, as happened previously in 1996 and 1998.

- **Sudan:** One year after the start of the latest war in Sudan between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF)
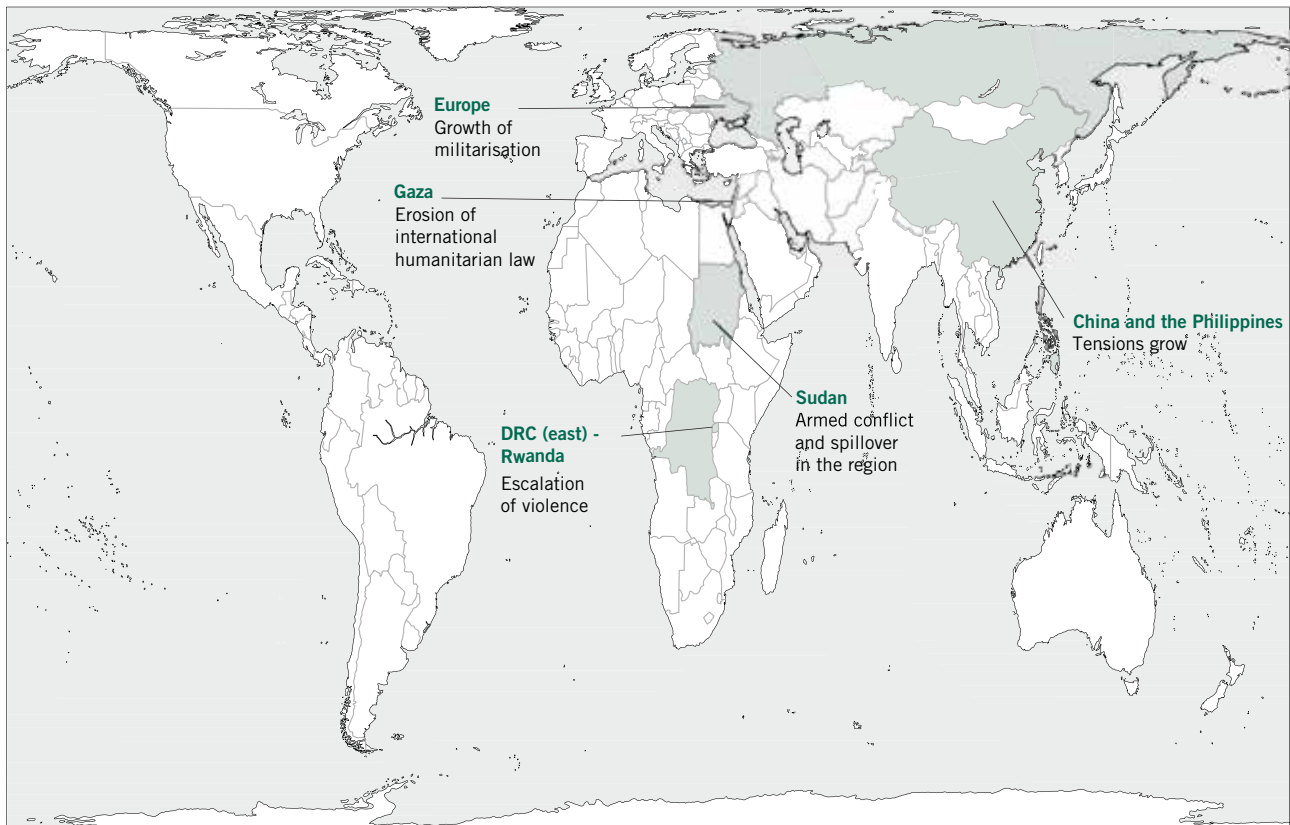
and the paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces (RSF), the violence has spread to almost the entire country, becoming a nationwide civil war. More than 15,550 people have lost their lives and 8.6 million people have been displaced by violence, giving the country the worst forced displacement crisis in the world. The prospects are dim for containing the violence and returning to the negotiations of 2022 to achieve a peaceful transition in the country. Moreover, the instability and violence in neighbouring Egypt, Libya, Chad, CAR, South Sudan and Ethiopia, which struggle with their own armed conflicts, may be aggravated by spillover from the war in Sudan, thereby amplifying the regional crisis.

The report identifies and analyzes five scenarios of armed conflict and tension that, given their condition, may worsen

■ **China – Philippines:** Since mid-2022, there has been a significant escalation of political and military tension between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea, with an unprecedented rise in the number of naval incidents, a clear strengthening of security and defence ties between the US and the Philippines and a notable boost in military spending to modernise the Philippines' ability to wage war.

■ **Europe:** The situation of conflict is worsening in Europe, including setbacks in prospects for resolving conflicts and tensions through dialogue. The invasion and war in Ukraine have gone on for over two years now, with serious impacts on human and environmental security and no prospects for a short-term resolution. Meanwhile, this war and the confrontation between Russia and Euro-Atlantic actors are prompting serious militarisation in Europe and negatively influencing various conflicts and negotiating processes there, such as in Moldova. Peace negotiations and efforts to support dialogue and mediation are on the retreat in Europe, while militarisation is growing.

■ **Gaza:** Of the various worrying trends in armed conflicts worldwide, one that especially stands out is the impact of violence on the civilian population and the systematic transgressions of international law and violations of human rights. The Israeli military operation in Gaza and the genocide against the Palestinian population have become a prime example of these violations, fuelling concern about the consequences of impunity and double standards for the future of international law and global order.

Conflict overview 2023

Continent	Armed conflict			Socio-political crises			TOTAL
	High	**Medium**	**Low**	**High**	**Medium**	**Low**	
Africa	*DRC (East)* DRC (east-ADF) Ethiopia (Amhara) *Ethiopia (Oromiya)* Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram) *Mali* *Somalia* *South Sudan* *Sudan* West Sahel Region	*CAR* *Cameroon (Ambazonia/Northwest Southwest)* DRC (west)	Burundi *Ethiopia (Tigray)** *Libya* Mozambique (north) Somalia (Somaliland – SSC Khatumo)	Chad *DRC* *DRC – Rwanda* *Eritrea – Ethiopia* Ethiopia Kenya Nigeria Nigeria (Biafra) Tunisia	Benin Burkina Faso Côte d'Ivoire *Ethiopia – Egypt – Sudan* *Ethiopia – Somalia* Gabon Guinea Mali *Morocco – Western Sahara* Niger Senegal *Sudan – South Sudan* Uganda	Algeria Djibouti Equatorial Guinea Eritrea Ethiopia – Sudan Guinea Bissau Madagascar *Mozambique* Nigeria (Delta Níger) Rwanda Rwanda – Burundi *Senegal (Casamance)* Sierra Leone Tanzania Togo Zimbabwe	
SUBTOTAL	**10**	**3**	**5**	**9**	**13**	**16**	**56**
America		*Colombia*		Ecuador El Salvador *Haiti* Honduras Mexico Peru *Venezuela* *Venezuela-Guyana*	Argentina Bolivia Brazil Chile Guatemala Nicaragua Panama	Colombia Cuba Jamaica Paraguay USA	
SUBTOTAL		**1**		**8**	**7**	**5**	**21**
Asia and the Pacific	*Myanmar* Pakistan	Afghanistan Pakistan (Balochistan)	India (CPI-M) India (Jammu and Kashmir) Philippines (Mindanao) *Philippines (NPA)* *Thailand (south)*	Afghanistan - Pakistan China – Philippines China – Japan China – Taiwan *Korea, DPR – USA, Japan, Rep. of Korea* *Korea, DPR – Rep. of Korea* India (Manipur) India – China Indonesia (West Papua) Papua New Guinea	Bangladesh China – USA India – Pakistan Pakistan South China Sea Sri Lanka Tajikistan	China (Hong Kong) China (Tíbet) China (Xinjiang) Korea, DPR Fiji *India (Nagaland)* Indonesia (Sulawesi) Japan – Russia (Kuril Islands) Kazakhstan Kyrgyzstan Kyrgyzstan – Tajikistan Lao, DPR Thailand Taikistan (Gorno-Badakhshan) Uzbekistan Uzbekistan (Karakalpakstan)	
SUBTOTAL	**2**	**2**	**5**	**10**	**7**	**16**	**42**
Europe	*Russia - Ukraine*		Türkiye (south-east)	*Armenia – Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh)* Russia	Belarus Bosnia and Herzegovina Moldova *Moldova (Transdniestria)* Russia – USA, NATO, EU *Serbia – Kosovo* Türkiye Türkiye – Greece, Cyprus	*Georgia (Abkhasia)* *Georgia (South Ossetia)* Russia (North Caucasus)	
SUBTOTAL	**1**		**1**	**2**	**8**	**3**	**15**
Middle East	Iraq *Israel – Palestine* Syria Yemen		Egypt (Sinai) Israel – Hezbollah	Iran *Iran – USA, Israel*	Egypt Iran (northwest) Iran (Sistan Balochistan) Lebanon	Bahrain Iraq (Kurdistan) *Palestine* Saudi Arabia	
SUBTOTAL	**4**	**0**	**2**	**2**	**4**	**4**	**16**
TOTAL	**17**	**6**	**13**	**31**	**39**	**44**	**150**

Armed conflicts and socio-political crises with ongoing peace negotiations, whether exploratory or formal, are identified in italics.
*This case is considered to have been active for some months in 2023, but it was no longer active at the end of the year.

Map 1.1. **Armed conflicts**

Labels on map: Russia, Philippines, Thailand, Myanmar, India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, Burundi, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Ukraine, Türkiye, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Israel, Egypt, Sudan, South Sudan, DRC, Libya, Chad, CAR, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Colombia
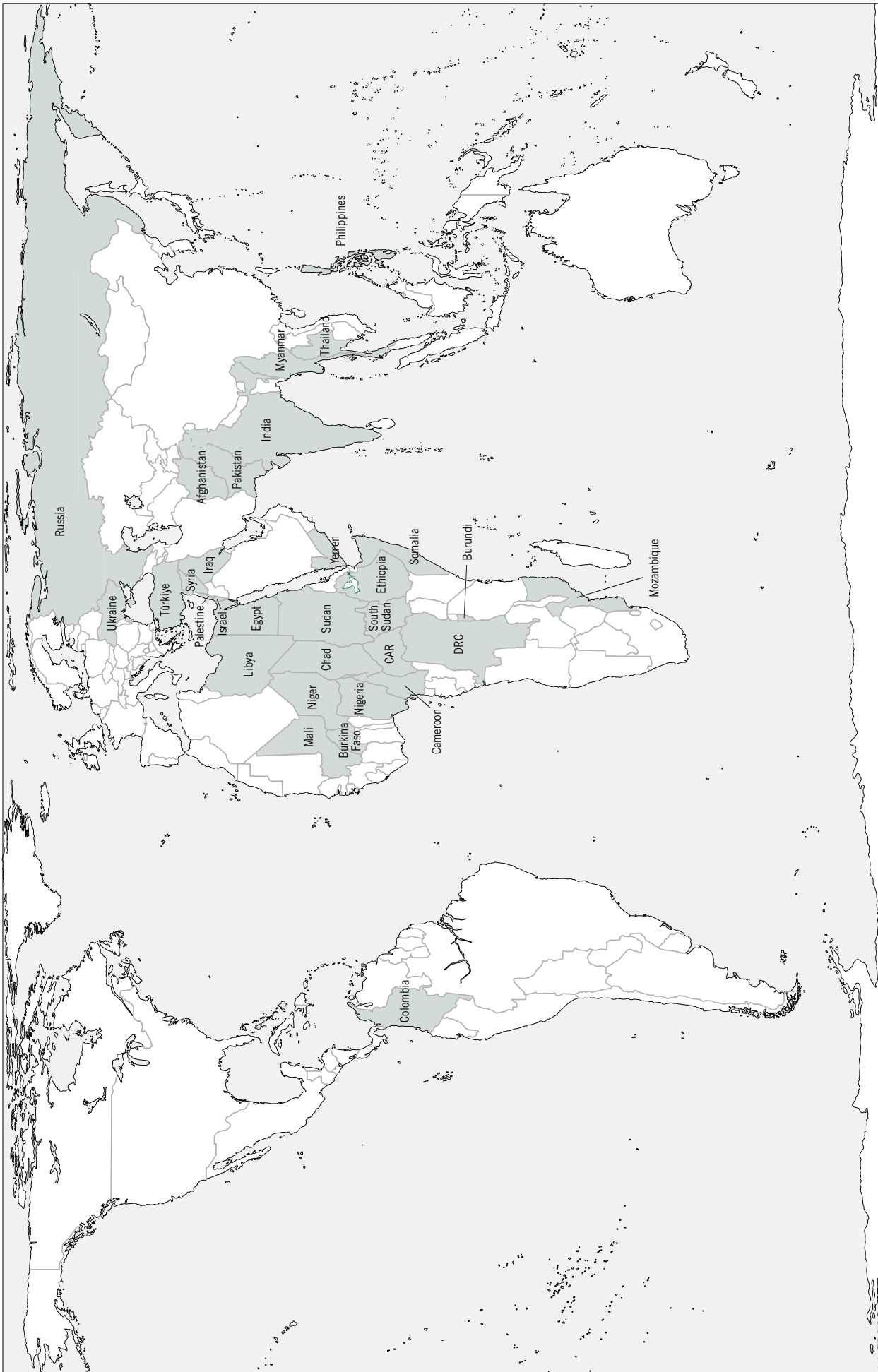
Countries with armed conflicts

End of armed conflict in 2023

1. Armed conflicts

- Thirty-six armed conflicts were reported in 2023, relatively more than the previous year, when there were 33, and the most since 2014.

- Most of the armed conflicts took place in Africa (18, half of the total), while the rest were in Asia and the Pacific (nine), the Middle East (six), Europe (two) and the Americas (one).

- Higher levels of violence and instability were reported in 42% of the armed conflicts in 2023, significantly more than the 30% of armed conflicts that had worsened the previous year

- The war in northern Mali resumed between the government and the Arab and Tuareg armed groups that had signed the 2015 Algiers peace agreement, organised under the Permanent Strategic Framework coalition (CSP).

- The Amhara special forces and Fano militias refused to dissolve and integrate into the Ethiopian police and the Ethiopian Army and clashed with federal government forces in increasingly intense battles.

- The M23's escalating attacks in the eastern DRC set off one of the world's major humanitarian and displacement crises and threatened to trigger a direct conflict between Rwanda and the DRC.

- The armed conflict that began on 15 April between the Sudanese Army and the paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces forcibly displaced over 7.5 million people and killed over 13,000 after eight months of fighting.

- Violence remained at high levels in Colombia, though there was less fighting between security forces and the groups ELN and EMC due to the ceasefire agreements reached.

- In Myanmar, the armed groups of the Three Brotherhood Alliance conducted the largest offensive against the security forces since the coup d'état in 2021.

- The invasion of and war in Ukraine caused serious damage in its second year, with 3.7 million people internally displaced, six million refugees in Europe and nearly half a million outside Europe.

- The Israeli campaign against the Gaza Strip in retaliation for Hamas' unprecedented attack on 7 October was denounced as collective punishment and genocide, with destabilising effects for the entire region.

The present chapter analyses the armed conflicts that occurred in 2023. It is organised into three sections. The first section offers a definition of armed conflict and its characteristics. The second section provides an analysis of the trends of conflicts in 2023, including global and regional trends and other issues related to international conflicts. The third section is devoted to describing the development and key events of the year in the various contexts. Furthermore, a map is included at the start of chapter that indicates the conflicts active in 2023.

Table 1.1. Summary of armed conflicts in 2023

Conflict[1] -beginning-	Type[2]	Main parties[3]	Intensity[4] / Trend[5]
AFRICA			
Burundi -2015-	Internationalised internal	Government, Imbonerakure Youth branch, political party CNDD-FDD, political party CNL, armed groups RED-TABARA, FPB (previously FOREBU), FNL	1
	Government		↑
Cameroon (Ambazonia/North West and South West) -2018-	Internationalised internal	Government of Cameroon, Government of Nigeria, political-military secessionist movement including the opposition Ambazonia Coalition Team (ACT, including IG Sako, to which belong the armed groups Lebialem Red Dragons and SOCADEF) and the Ambazonia Governing Council (AGovC, including IG Sisiku, whose armed wing is the Ambazonia Defence Forces, ADF), multiple militias and smaller armed groups	2
	Self-government, Identity		=
CAR -2006-	Internationalised internal	Government, armed groups that are members of the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC, made up of anti-balaka factions led by Mokom and Ngaïssona, 3R, FPRC, MPC and UPC), opposition armed coalition Siriri, ethnic militia AAKG, Sudanese Rapid Support Forces (RSF) militias, other local and foreign armed groups, France, MINUSCA, Rwanda, Russia, Wagner Group	2
	Government, Resources		=
DRC (east) -1998-	International	DRC, Burundi, Angola, MONUSCO, EAC Regional Force (Burundi, Kenya, Uganda and South Sudan), SAMIDRC (regional force of the SADC, composed of troops from South Africa, Malawi and Tanzania), pro-government militias Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (VDP, known as Wazalendo, composed of dozens of former Mai Mai militias and other armed groups from North Kivu and South Kivu, like APCLS, PARECO-FF, Nyatura, Raïa Mutomboki), FDLR, FDLR splinter groups (CNRD-Ubwiyunge, RUD-Urunana), private security companies (Agemira RDC and Congo Protection); March 23 Movement (M23), Twirwaneho, Rwanda; other armed groups not part of Wazalendo, Burundian armed groups; armed group of Ugandan origin LRA; Ituri groups and community militias (including, CODECO/URDPC, FPIC, FRPI, MAPI, Zaïre-FPAC)	3
	Government, Identity, Resources		↑
DRC (east – ADF) -2014-	Internationalised internal	Government of DRC, Government of Uganda, Mai-Mai militias, armed opposition group ADF, MONUSCO	3
	System, Resources		=

1. This column includes the states in which armed conflicts are taking place, specifying in brackets the region within each state to which the crisis is confined or the name of the armed group involved in the conflict.
2. This report classifies and analyses armed conflicts using two criteria: on the one hand, the causes or clashes of interests and, on the other hand, the convergence between the scenario of conflict and the actors involved. The following main causes can be distinguished: demands for self-determination and self-government (Self-government) or identity aspirations (Identity); opposition to the political, economic, social or ideological system of a state (System) or the internal or international policies of a government (Government), which in both cases produces a struggle to take or erode power; or the struggle for the control of resources (Resources) or territory (Territory). In respect of the second type, the armed conflicts may be of an internal, Internationalised internal or international nature. An internal armed conflict is defined as a conflict involving armed actors from the same state who operate exclusively within the territory of this state. Secondly, an internationalised internal armed conflict is defined as that in which at least one of the parties involved is foreign and/or in which the tension spills over into the territory of neighbouring countries. Another factor taken into account in order to consider an armed conflict as internationalised internal is the existence of military bases of armed groups in neighbouring countries (in connivance with these countries) from which attacks are launched. Finally, an international conflict is one in which state and non-state parties in two or more countries confront each other. It should also be taken into account that most current armed conflicts have a significant regional or international dimension and influence due, among other factors, to flows of refugees, the arms trade, economic or political interests (such as legal or illegal exploitation of resources) that the neighbouring countries have in the conflict, the participation of foreign combatants or the logistical and military support provided by other states.
3. This column shows the actors that intervene directly in the hostilities. The main actors who participate directly in the conflicts are made up of a mixture of regular or irregular armed parties. The conflicts usually involve the government, or its armed forces, fighting against one or several armed opposition groups, but can also involve other irregular groups such as clans, guerrillas, warlords, armed groups in opposition to each other or militias from ethnic or religious communities. Although they most frequently use conventional weapons, and more specifically small arms (which cause most deaths in conflicts), in many cases other methods are employed, such as suicide attacks, bombings and sexual violence and even hunger as a weapon of war. There are also other actors who do not directly participate in the armed activities but who nevertheless have a significant influence on the conflict.
4. The intensity of an armed conflict (high, medium or low) and its trend (escalation of violence, reduction of violence, unchanged) are evaluated mainly on the basis of how deadly it is (number of fatalities) and according to its impact on the population and the territory. Moreover, there are other aspects worthy of consideration, such as the systematisation and frequency of the violence or the complexity of the military struggle (complexity is normally related to the number and fragmentation of the actors involved, to the level of institutionalisation and capacity of the state, and to the degree of internationalisation of the conflict, as well as to the flexibility of objectives and to the political will of the parties to reach agreements). As such, high-intensity armed conflicts are usually defined as those that cause over 1,000 fatalities per year, as well as affecting a significant proportion of the territory and population, and involving several actors (who forge alliances, confront each other or establish a tactical coexistence). Medium and low intensity conflicts, with over 100 fatalities per year, have the aforementioned characteristics but with a more limited presence and scope. An armed conflict is considered ended when a significant and sustained reduction in armed hostilities occurs, whether due to a military victory, an agreement between the actors in conflict, demobilisation by one of the parties, or because one of the parties abandons or significantly scales down the armed struggle as a strategy to achieve certain objectives. None of these options necessarily mean that the underlying causes of the armed conflict have been overcome. Nor do they exclude the possibility of new outbreaks of violence. The temporary cessation of hostilities, whether formal or tacit, does not necessarily imply the end of the armed conflict.
5. This column compares the trend of the events of 2023 with those that of 2022. The escalation of violence symbol (↑) indicates that the general situation in 2023 has been more serious than in the previous year; the reduction of violence symbol (↓) indicates an improvement in the situation; and the unchanged (=) symbol indicates that no significant changes have taken place.

Conflict -beginning-	Type	Main parties	Intensity / Trend
AFRICA			
DRC (west) –2023-	Internal	DRC, Teke community militias, Yaka and Suku community militias (including the armed group Mobondo) and other allied community militias	2
	Identity, Resources, Territory		↑
Ethiopia (Amhara) -2023-	Internalised internal	Government of Ethiopia, regional government of Amhara, Amhara Fano militia	3
	Government, Self-government, Identity		↑
Ethiopia (Oromia) -2022-	Internal	Government of Ethiopia, Oromia State Regional Government, armed group Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), pro-government Amharic militia Fano	3
	Self-government, Identity, Resources		=
Ethiopia (Tigray) -2020-[6]	Internationalised internal	Government of Ethiopia, Government of Eritrea, Tigray State Regional Government, security forces and militias of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), security forces of the Amhara and Afar regions, pro-government Amharic militia Fano	1
	Government, Self-government, Identity		End
Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram) -2011-	Internationalised internal	Government of Nigeria, Civilian Joint Task Force pro-government milita, Boko Haram factions (ISWAP, JAS-Abubakar Shekau, Ansaru, Bakura), civilian militias, Multinational Joint Task Force MNJTF (Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger)	3
	System		=
Libya -2011-	Internationalised internal	Unity Government with headquarters in Tripoli, National Stability Government (NSG) with headquarters in Tobruk, armed groups including the Libyan National Army (LNA, also called Arab Libyan Armed Forces, ALAF), ISIS, AQIM, mercenaries and Wagner Group, Türkiye	1
	Government, Resources, System		=
Mali -2012-	Internationalised internal	Government, the Permanent Strategic Framework (CSP) which brings together the armed groups affiliated with CMA (MNLA, MAA faction, CPA, HCUA) and Platform (GATIA, CMPFPR, MAA faction)–, The Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wa al-Muslimeen) (JNIM or GSIM), Islamic State in the West Africa Province (ISWAP) –also known as Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)-, Katiba Macina, MINUSMA, Russia, Wagner Group	3
	System, Self-government, Identity		↑
Mozambique (north) -2017-	Internationalised internal	Government, Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) or Islamic State in Mozambique Province (ISMP) -formerly Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jama (ASWJ)-, al-Qaeda, South African private security company DAG (Dyck Advisory Group), Tanzania, Rwanda, South Africa, Mission in Mozambique of the Southern African Development Community (SAMIM), "Naparama" local militias	1
	System, Identity		↓
Somalia -1988-	Internationalised internal	Federal Government of Somalia, pro-government regional forces, Somaliland, Puntland, clan militias and warlords, Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'a, USA, France, Ethiopia, Türkiye, AMISOM/ATMIS, EUNAVFOR Somalia, Combined Task Force 151, al-Shabaab, ISIS	3
	Government, System		↑
Somalia (Somaliland-SSC Khatumo) -2023-	Internal	Republic of Somaliland, SSC-Khatumo administration (Khatumo State), Puntland State, al-Shabaab	1
	Self-Government, Identity, Territory		↑
South Sudan -2009-	Internationalised internal	Government (SPLM/A), SPLM/A-in Opposition armed group (faction of former vice president, Riek Machar), Kitgwang dissident factions of the SPLA-IO led by Peter Gatdet, Simon Gatwech Dual and Johnson Olony (also known as "Agwalek"), SPLM-FD, SSLA, SSDM/A, SSDM-CF, SSNLM, REMNASA, NAS, SSUF (Paul Malong), communal militias (SSPPF, TFN, White Army, Shilluk Agwelek), Sudan Revolutionary Front armed coalition (SRF, composed of JEM, SLA-AW, SLA-MM and SPLM-N), Non-Signatory South Sudan Opposition Groups (NSSSOG), previously the South Sudan Opposition Movements Alliance (SSOMA, composed of NAS, SSUF/A, Real-SPLM, NDM-PF, UDRM/A, NDM-PF, SSNMC), Sudan, Uganda, UNMISS	3
	Government, Resources, Identity		↓
Sudan -2003-[7]	Internationalised internal	Government (Sudan Armed Forces), Rapid Support Forces (RSF), armed coalition Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF, composed of JEM, SLA-AW, SLA-MM and SPLM-N), several SLA factions, Eastern Sudan Liberation Forces, United Popular Front for Liberation and Justice, Beja National Congress, Beja Armed Congress, community militias, Wagner Group	3
	Government, Self-government, Resources, Identity		↑

6. The situation in the Ethiopian region of Tigray was no longer considered an armed conflict in early 2023 due to the positive turn of events, including the significant drop in violence and its impacts and progress in implementing the 2022 agreement. See Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

7. In previous years, two distinct armed conflicts were identified in Sudan: Sudan (Darfur), which began in 2003, and Sudan (South Kordofan and Blue Nile), which started in 2012. Both conflicts, characterised as internationalised internal and motivated by self-government, resources and identity, were analysed jointly in this edition as part of the Sudanese armed conflict. This is because the dynamics of the armed conflict that began in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) affect a large part of the country and particularly the regions of Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile. Irregular armed actors from these regions are also actively involved in the conflict.

Conflict -beginning-	Type	Main parties	Intensity / Trend
AFRICA			
Western Sahel Region -2018-	International	Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Togo, Benin, Ivory Coast, G5-Sahel Joint Force (Mauritania, Chad, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso), Joint Task Force for the Liptako-Gourma Region (Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso), MINUSMA, France (Operation Barkhane), USA, Takouba Task Force (Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Mali, Netherlands, Niger, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and United Kingdom), Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM or GSIM), Islamic State in the Province of West Africa (ISWAP) - also known as Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)-, Katiba Macina, Ansaroul Islam, other jihadist groups and community militias, Russia, Wagner Group	3
	System, Resources, Identity		↑
AMERICA			
Colombia -1964-	Internationalised internal	Government, ELN, Estado Mayor Central (EMC), Segunda Marquetalia, narco-paramilitary groups	2
	System		=
ASIA			
Afghanistan -2001-	Internationalised internal	Government, National Resistance Front of Afghanistan (NRF), ISIS-KP, Afghanistan Freedom Front (AFF)	2
	System		↓
India (CPI-M) -1967-	Internal	Government, CPI-M (naxalites)	1
	System		=
India (Jammu and Kashmir) -1989-	Internationalised internal	Governments, Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, Jaish-e-Muhammad, United Jihad Council, Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), The Resistance Front (TRF)	1
	Self-government, Identity		↓
Myanmar -1948-	Internationalised internal	Government, armed groups (Ceasefire signatories: ABSDF, ALP, CNF, DKBA, KNU, KNU/KNLA-PC, PNLO, RCSS, NMSP, LDU; Non-signatories: KIA, NDAA, MNDAA, SSPP/SSA, TNLA, AA, UWSA, ARSA, KNPP), PDF	3
	Self-government, Identity		↑
Pakistan -2001-	Internationalised internal	Government, Armed Forces, intelligence services, Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), ISIS-KP	3
	System		↑
Pakistan (Balochistan) -2005-	Internationalised internal	Government, BLA, BNA, BLF and BLT; LeJ, TTP, ISIS-KP	2
	Self-government, Identity, Resources		↑
Philippines (Mindanao) -1991-	Internationalised internal	Government, Abu Sayyaf, BIFF, Islamic State of Lanao/ Dawlay Islamiyah/ Maute Group, Ansarul Khilafah Mindanao, Toraife group, factions of MILF and MNLF	1
	Self-government, System, Identity		↓
Philippines (NPA) -1969-	Internal	Government, NPA	1
	System		=
Thailand (south) -2004-	Internal	Government, BRN and other separatist armed opposition groups	1
	Self-government, Identity		↓
EUROPE			
Türkiye (south-east) -1984-	Internationalised internal	Government, PKK, TAK, ISIS	1
	Self-government, Identity		↓
Russia – Ukraine -2022-[8]	International	Russia, Wagner Group, Donbas militias, Ukraine	3
	Government, Territory		=
MIDDLE EAST			
Egypt (Sinai) -2014-	Internationalised internal	Government, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (ABM) or Sinai Province (branch of ISIS), pro-government militia Union of Sinai Tribes (UST)	1
	System		↓

8. Between 2014 and 2021 the war in eastern Ukraine was analysed as an internationalised internal conflict. See the summary on "Ukraine (east)" in pre-2022 editions of this report.

Conflict -beginning-	Type	Main parties	Intensity / Trend
MIDDLE EAST			
Iraq -2003-	Internationalised internal	Government, Iraqi military and security forces, Kurdish forces (peshmerga), Shia militias Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) and Saraya Salam, Sunni militias, ISIS, international anti-ISIS coalition led by USA, USA, Iran, Türkiye	3
	System, Government, Identity, Resources		↓
Israel – Hezbollah[9] -2023-	International	Israel, Hezbollah	1
	System, Resources, Territory		↑
Israel – Palestine -2000-	International	Israeli government, settler militias, PA, Fatah (Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades), Hamas (Ezzedin al-Qassam Brigades), Islamic Jihad, FPLP, FDLP, Popular Resistance Committees, Salafists groups, brigades of Jenin, Nablus and Tubas, Lion's Den	3
	Self-government, Identity, Territory		↑
Syria -2011-	Internationalised internal	Government, pro-government militias, Free Syrian Army (FSA), Ahrar alSham, Syrian Democratic Forces (coalition that includes the YPG/YPJ militias of the PYD), Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (formerly al-Nusra Front), Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), ISIS, international anti-ISIS coalition led by USA, Türkiye, Hezbollah, Iran, Russia, Israel	3
	System, Government, Self-government, Identity		↑
Yemen -2004-	Internationalised internal	Armed forces loyal to the internationally recognised Government, followers of the cleric al-Houthi (al-Shabaab al-Mumen/Ansar Allah), tribal militias linked to al-Alhmar clan, Salafist militias (including Happy Yemen Brigades), armed groups linked to the Islamist Islah party, separatist groups under the umbrella of the Southern Transitional Council (STC), Joint Forces (including the Giants Brigades), AQAP, ISIS, international coalition led by Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), USA and military coalition Guardian of Prosperity	3
	System, Government, Identity		↓

1: low intensity; 2: medium intensity; 3: high intensity;
↑: escalation of violence ; ↓: decrease of violence ; = : unchanged; End: no longer considered an armed conflict

1.1. Armed conflicts: definition

An **armed conflict** is any confrontation between regular or irregular armed groups with objectives that are perceived as incompatible in which the continuous and organised use of violence a) causes a minimum of 100 battle-related deaths in a year and/or a serious impact on the territory (destruction of infrastructures or of natural resources) and human security (e.g. wounded or displaced population, sexual violence, food insecurity, impact on mental health and on the social fabric or disruption of basic services) and b) aims to achieve objectives that are different than those of common delinquency and are normally linked to:

- demands for self-determination and self-government or identity issues;
- the opposition to the political, economic, social or ideological system of a state or the internal or international policy of the government, which in both cases leads to fighting to seize or erode power;
- control over the resources or the territory.

1.2. Armed conflicts: analysis of trends in 2023

This section offers an analysis of the global and regional trends in armed conflicts in 2023. This includes an overview of conflicts as compared to that of previous years, the geographical distribution of conflicts and the main trends by region, the relationship between the actors involved and the scenario of the dispute, the main causes of the current armed conflicts, the general evolution of the contexts and the intensity of the conflicts according to their levels of violence and their impact. Likewise, this section analyses some of the main consequences of armed conflicts in the civilian population, including forced displacement due to situations of conflict and violence.

1.2.1 Global and regional trends

In line with the trend observed in 2022, **the number of armed conflicts increased worldwide in 2023**. Thirty-six armed conflicts were identified in total, compared to 33 in 2022 and 32 in 2021. Previously, between 2018 and 2020, there had been 34. **The total number of armed conflicts in 2023 is the highest since 2014. Dynamics of violence caused five new scenarios to be classified as armed conflicts in 2023**, four of them in Africa. In Ethiopia's Amhara region, the federal government's decision to disarm and dissolve the Fano paramilitary militias to integrate them into the Ethiopian Army and the Ethiopian police led to serious clashes between these militias and government forces. In the Horn of Africa,

9. This armed conflict involves and influences other regional actors in different ways. In previous editions of the report, the dynamics of this dispute were analysed in the chapter on Socio-political crises under the title "Israel – Syria – Lebanon". Analyses in recent years have highlighted Iran's growing involvement in this conflict.

hostilities between the security forces of Somaliland, a self-proclaimed independent region of Somalia whose status remains a matter of dispute, and militias of the Khatumo region, which seeks to become a new state within Somalia, even though it is part of Somaliland, escalated significantly in early 2023 and remained active throughout the year. Meanwhile, in the western part of the DRC, the conflict between the Teke and Yaka communities over land ownership that had begun the previous year in the province of Mai-Ndombe worsened and the violence spread to several neighbouring provinces in 2023. A new armed conflict broke out in Sudan, mainly pitting the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) against the paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The eruption of violence starting in April ended up spreading to a large part of the country and especially to the regions of Darfur, Kordofan and Blue Nile, where local armed groups became actively involved in the hostilities. Therefore, the armed conflicts in these Sudanese regions, which were previously analysed separately in this report, are analysed together in this edition as part of the broader conflict in Sudan. The last new conflict took place in the Middle East, where intensifying tensions caused by the crisis in Gaza opened an especially significant front around the border between Israel and Lebanon. The increase in the magnitude, frequency and scope of the hostilities between Israeli and Hezbollah forces and the impacts of the violence prompted its classification as an armed conflict in late 2023.[10] **Compared to 2022, there was also an armed conflict that ended in 2023**: Ethiopia (Tigray). The significant reduction in violence, the withdrawal of local armed groups and foreign forces and the effective disarmament of combatants after the peace agreement was signed between the federal government of Ethiopia and the political and military authorities of Tigray in November 2022 led us to stop considering this case an armed conflict in 2023.[11]

The geographical distribution of the armed conflicts in 2023 upheld the trend observed in previous periods and the vast majority continued to be concentrated in Africa (18) and Asia and the Pacific (nine), followed by the Middle East (six), Europe (two) and the Americas (one). **Half the armed conflicts in the world (50%) took place in Africa**.

These various armed conflicts were of an internal, internationalised internal and/or international nature. Although most armed conflicts continued to be internationalised internal ones, following the trend of previous years, the number of internal and international conflicts increased in 2023. Seventeen per cent of the armed conflicts were considered internal in 2023, more than in the previous year. Whereas there were

Graph 1.1. **Regional distribution of the number of armed conflicts in 2023**

Half the armed conflicts took place in Africa in 2023, totalling 18 (50%), followed by Asia and the Pacific (nine), the Middle East (six), Europe (two) and the Americas (one)
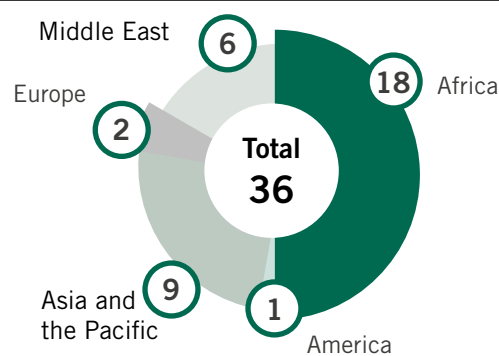
four conflicts of this type in 2022, there were six in 2023. The internal conflicts of Ethiopia (Oromia), the Philippines (NPA), India (CPI-M) and Thailand (south) were joined in 2023 by the cases of the DRC (west) and Somalia (Somaliland-SSC-Khatumo). While most internal armed conflicts had previously taken place in Asia, they were distributed equally between Asia and Africa in 2023. Five armed conflicts were international in nature. This was also more than in previous periods, climbing from three in 2022 to five in 2023. The three analysed in 2022 (the armed conflict in the African region of Western Sahel, the Palestinian-Israeli dispute in the Middle East and the war between Russia and Ukraine) were joined by the Israel-Hezbollah conflict, linked to the Gaza crisis, and the conflict in the DRC (east) in 2023. The armed conflict between Israel and the Lebanese militia Hezbollah had been analysed in previous issues of the report as an international socio-political crisis under the heading "Israel-Syria-Lebanon". Although Israel and Hezbollah are the main parties to the armed conflict, it indirectly involves and impacts other regional actors in various ways. This also includes Iran, which has become increasingly involved in recent years due to its close relationship with Hezbollah, which intensified during the war in Syria. The armed conflict in the DRC (east) dates back to the late 1990s. It had been analysed as an internationalised internal conflict, but in this issue it is considered international due to Rwanda's direct participation in the hostilities, as verified by a UN Group of Experts.

The rest of the cases (equivalent to 69%, or 25 of 36) were internationalised internal in nature. There were significantly less of these than in previous years, as they accounted for 79% of the armed conflicts in 2022 and 81% in 2021. Though part of the dynamics of these armed conflicts are internal, some of the warring parties are foreign, the armed actors in the conflict have bases or launch attacks from abroad and/or the

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10. Ibid.
11. See chapter 2 (Peace negotiations in Africa) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

fighting has spilled over to neighbouring countries. In many conflicts, this internationalisation involved third parties as combatants, including international missions, ad-hoc regional and international military coalitions, states, cross-border armed groups, international private security companies and others.

Following the trend of previous years, United Nations international peacekeeping missions continued to play a role in 2023, especially in armed conflicts in Africa. During 2023, UN missions remained operational in the CAR (MINUSCA), South Sudan (UNSMISS), Mali (MINUSMA) and the DRC (MONUSCO). Several of these missions encountered many problems, however, leading MINUSMA AND MONUSCO to start their withdrawal or total departure.

The most notable case was that of MINUSMA, the UN mission that left Mali in late 2023 after a decade and after suffering the second-most deaths in UN mission history. The Malian government's announcement that the mission was ending led to the first armed clashes in the country between the parties that signed the 2015 peace agreement, especially in the north, where there were also struggles for control of the MINUSMA bases. These events had been preceded by the deterioration of diplomatic relations between the Malian military junta and its former allies after it approached Russia and the Russian private security company Wagner Group in 2022. The MONUSCO mission also began to withdraw in early 2024 at the DRC government's request. Two thousand peacekeepers left the country in the first phase, amidst protests against the mission and criticism of its passivity in the face of escalating violence. Along similar lines, the severe security crisis in Sudan in 2023 led the UN Security Council to decide to end the mandate of the Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) in December, despite its political and non-military nature, and ordered the closure of its operations by the first quarter of 2024.

In recent years, a new trend has been emerging that culminated in the closure or announcement of closure of various bilateral and multilateral operations in Africa in 2023. In addition to the withdrawal of three major UN missions in sub-Saharan Africa, two of them with peacekeeping mandates (Mali and the DRC) and another providing political assistance (Sudan), the European Union and French missions in the Western Sahel also began or completed their withdrawal. The scheduled closure of the AU mission in Somalia (ATMIS) and the dissolution of the G5 Sahel regional anti-jihadist coalition

Although most armed conflicts continued to be internationalised internal, the number of internal and international cases increased

also began after Burkina Faso and Niger announced their withdrawal from the alliance in December 2023, following the path previously taken by Mali. The two remaining members, Mauritania and Chad, recognised that the departure of three of the five founding members of the alliance created in 2014 represented its de facto dissolution. This dynamic owes to several factors. The first factor is the geopolitical tension between the West and Russia stemming from the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Secondly, there is a component of appropriation in response to the changes in leadership of some West African countries through coups d'état in recent years, where the pressures and double standards of regional and international organisations led to rejection of the international community and especially France as a postcolonial regional enforcer within the framework of Françafrique. Thirdly, citizens of these countries (rather questionably) believe that these missions have failed to achieve their aims after years of uninterrupted activity in Africa. The CAR and Chad are also no strangers to this trend, which is behind demonstrations to reject the West, more or less politically exploited or even instigated by foreign countries.

Regional organisations continued to be involved in many armed conflicts in the form military missions or operations. Examples include the European Union's EUNAVFOR mission in Somalia and the mission of the South African Development Council (SADC) in Mozambique, SAMIM. In collaboration with Rwandan troops, SAMIM expanded its activity to Cabo Delgado in 2022. In 2023, it played a major role in reducing violence caused by the jihadist insurgency[12] in this region of Mozambique. The SADC also created a mission in the DRC (SAMIDRC, composed of troops from South Africa, Malawi and Tanzania) in 2023 to replace the EAC mission in the DRC, which had been criticised for its passivity throughout the year and withdrew from the country at the government's request in December. **Different hybrid missions also remained active in 2023**, involving regional organisations and states. For example, the maritime military operation Combined Task Force 151, which operates in the Horn of Africa and the Indian Ocean, was active in Somalia. Led by the United States, it works together with the European mission EUNAVFOR. A similar hybrid international effort is the Global Coalition Against Daesh. Established in 2014, this ani-Islamic State coalition is led by the United States and joined by 87 actors in total, including the EU and the Arab League. Though initially focused on Iraq and Syria, the coalition is now also active in West Africa due to the rising activity of jihadist groups there.

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12. The concept of jihad has and has historically had multiple connotations. The term implies the idea of "effort" and many Muslims and scholars of Islam reject its use to describe armed groups because they consider that they use a religious concept to justify illegitimate violence. Taking into account these debates and, at the same time, the widespread use of the term in the field of international relations and peace and security studies, this report refers to "groups with jihadist agendas" when it is the armed organizations themselves that In their narratives and declaration of intentions they appeal to their particular interpretation of Islamic precepts.

Third-party involvement remained a factor in many internationalised internal conflicts and made many of them more complex. In Yemen, for example, given the rise in armed attacks by the Houthis in the Red Sea and their attacks on Israel in retaliation for the Israeli military offensive in Gaza, the US became militarily involved. Thus, in December 2023, Washington announced the establishment of an international military operation in the area, which is key for global maritime trade, with the declared intention of stopping the Houthis' actions. Other countries participating in Operation Prosperity Guardian include the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Greece, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Singapore and Sri Lanka. This dynamic of confrontation added uncertainty to the prospects for a negotiated solution in Yemen in a year of intensified dialogue between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis.[13] Iran continued to be actively involved in armed conflicts in the Middle East through its support for Bashar Assad's regime in Syria, its relationships with friendly militias in Iraq and its political, logistical and/or military support for other actors in the region, like the Houthis and the Palestinian group Hamas. **Demonstrating the internationalisation and interrelation of various armed conflicts in the region, the crisis in Gaza also intensified attacks against US targets in Iraq and Syria, as well as Israel and the United States' attacks in these two countries against actors in Iran's orbit calling themselves the "axis of resistance"**. Meanwhile, in line with the dynamics observed in previous years, Türkiye continued its military campaign against the Kurdish armed group PKK through cross-border attacks against its positions in northern Iraq. Many non-state armed actors also conducted cross-border offensives, such as the Houthis in their attacks against Israel and against vessels bound for Israel in the Red Sea. The different factions of Boko Haram continued to operate in the Lake Chad basin in 2023, which encompasses land in Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and Chad. The battle for supremacy in the region intensified between Boko Haram and ISWAP, a branch of ISIS in West Africa that also operates in several countries in the area.

Regarding the role of private security companies, the Russian Wagner Group was involved in at least seven armed conflicts on several continents, but mainly in Africa. In 2023, the organisation was active in Libya, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, the CAR, Sudan, Russia-Ukraine and Syria. In Syria, it fought against members of ISIS in support of Syrian government forces. In Mali, it also fought alongside the government and local security forces against several Arab and Tuareg armed groups. In the war between Ukraine and Russia, the Wagner Group played a particularly significant role around Bakhmut (Donetsk region), one of the most active fronts in 2023 and where it acknowledged having suffered around 20,000 casualties. In June 2023, after months of tension and disagreements with the Russian

authorities, the Wagner Group led a military uprising against Moscow. The mutiny was dismantled and the organisation's leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, died two months later when the plane in which he was travelling crashed. The crash was blamed on Moscow. **Wagner's rebellion and its consequences ended up having impacts on the operations of the group's militias**. For example, the situation led to the withdrawal of hundreds of the organisation's mercenaries who were deployed in the CAR.

The **multi-causal nature of contemporary armed conflicts** was confirmed in 2023. Following the trend of previous years, **the main causes of most of the conflicts (26 of the 36, equivalent to 72%) included questioning of the political, economic, social or ideological system of the state and/or disputes about the domestic or international policies of the respective governments**. In line with recent trends, disputes about the system drove 19 of the 36 armed conflicts (53%) in 2023. In most cases, they were related to jihadist armed actors with political agendas based on their particular interpretation of Islamic law. These groups include Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region, the Pakistani Taliban's TTP militias and the different groups that have claimed to be branches and/or "provinces" of ISIS beyond its area of origin in Iraq and Syria, in places such as the Lake Chad region, Somalia, Libya, Egypt (Sinai), Afghanistan, Pakistan, Pakistan (Balochistan), the Philippines (Mindanao) and Yemen. In Libya, Egypt (Sinai) and the Philippines (Mindanao), these groups' operations have fallen significantly compared to previous years. In three other cases (Colombia, the Philippines (NPA) and India (CPI-M)), disputes about the system were associated with other kinds of insurgencies, ideologically linked to communism and Maoism. Fourteen of the 36 armed conflicts (39%) were caused by the domestic or international policies of the respective governments, leading to struggles to erode or access power. One such case was the armed conflict in Libya, which continued to feature power struggles between rival governments. Others included the conflicts in the CAR, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

Armed conflicts were also primarily caused by disputes over identity and/or demands for self-government. These were behind 21 of the 36 armed conflicts in 2023, or 58%. In line with previous years, identity-related disputes were more significant than demands for self-government, as the former were identified in 22 conflicts (61% of the total), compared to 14 for the latter (39%). Identity-related aspirations were relevant in new armed conflicts in Africa in 2023. For example, they were linked to Amhara nationalist claims in Ethiopia, to the interest of the SSC-Khatumo administration to become a new state of Somalia as part of the historical dispute over border regions between Somaliland and Puntland and to the clashes and power struggles between the

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13. For more information, see the summary on Yemen in chapter 6 (Peace negotiations in the Middle East) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

Teke and Yaka communities in the DRC (west). Other armed conflicts related to self-government and/or identity took place in Cameroon (Ambazonia/North West and South West), Ethiopia (Oromia), Ethiopia (Tigray), Mali, Mozambique (north), the Western Sahel region, the DRC (east), Sudan, the Philippines (Mindanao), India (Jammu and Kashmir), Myanmar, Pakistan (Balochistan), Thailand (south), Türkiye (south-east), Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Syria and Yemen.

Finally, many armed conflicts were mainly caused by control of territory and/or resources. These factors were identified in 15 of the 36 conflicts (42%). Between the two, struggles for resources were more important, as they were behind one third (33%) of the armed conflicts in 2023. In line with previous years, **the conflicts that involved disputes over resources mainly took place in Africa, though this factor also had an indirect effect in many conflicts in other regions, perpetuating violence through war economies**. Throughout 2023, disputes around these issues were relevant in the conflict in the Lake Chad region, which pitted Boko Haram against the ISIS branch, ISWAP; in Libya, where multiple armed groups struggled over the control of resources and territory; and in the CAR, where the Sudanese Rapid Support Forces (RSF) received mining exploitation rights in exchange for fighting against armed groups. The DRC (east) continued to be an iconic scene of armed conflict with an important background linked to the control of resources. In 2023, widespread violence increased the illegal exploitation of natural resources and control procedures collapsed in various mining sites, leading to an increase in smuggling to Rwanda. Areas of mining activity also tended to be scenes of violence in Pakistan (Balochistan), where another armed conflict was partially motivated by a dispute over resources, and in India, as part of the conflict involving the Naxalite insurgency. Issues linked to the control of territory were found in five armed conflicts (14% of the total) and were especially significant in the case of Palestine-Israel. The Israeli military offensive in Gaza and the operations of the Israeli security forces and attacks by Jewish settlers in the West Bank, which led to massive forced displacements and expulsions of the population, were described as attempts at ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian population to consolidate Israeli control over the territory. These policies were also accompanied by many authorisations for new settlements in the West Bank. The territorial issue was also key in the dispute between Israel and Hezbollah, with hostilities concentrated on the de facto border between Israel and Lebanon.

Our analysis indicates a significant increase in **armed conflicts trending towards higher levels of violence and instability in 2023**. **Forty-two per cent of the armed**

Forty-two per cent of the armed conflicts worsened, with rising levels of violence in 2023

conflicts worsened, significantly more than the 30% that deteriorated in 2022. **The armed conflicts that got worse were in Africa** (Burundi, Ethiopia (Amhara), Mali, the Western Sahel region, the DRC (east), the DRC (west), Somalia, Somalia (Somaliland – SCC-Khatumo) and Sudan), **in Asia** (Myanmar, Pakistan and Pakistan (Balochistan)) **and in the Middle East** (Israel-Palestine, Israel-Hezbollah and Syria). In some conflicts, an escalation of violence put an end to ceasefire agreements that had been in force for years. In Mali, the ceasefire had lasted years and in Pakistan it was broken after several months. The rest of the armed conflicts were split more or less evenly between those with levels of hostilities and violence similar to those in 2022 (10 conflicts, equivalent to 28%) and those with comparatively lower levels (11 conflicts, accounting for 30%). In some of the conflicts that saw less fighting, the trend was linked to some armed actors' apparent weakening and decline in activity as a result of the dynamics of the hostilities. This was true of the conflict in Mozambique (north), where there was a notable drop in the associated death toll and in the number of attacks targeting civilians, but also in the Philippines (Mindanao) and Egypt (Sinai). In other conflicts, the decrease in fighting was linked to the impact of negotiating processes and peace or ceasefire agreements, such as in Ethiopia (Tigray), which was no longer considered an armed conflict in 2023 due to the course of events after the peace agreement was signed in November 2022, and in Yemen, where the ceasefire agreement signed in 2022 was de facto maintained and negotiating channels remained active between the main actors involved in the hostilities.[14] In many of these conflicts, the relative de-escalation and/or reduction in violence compared to 2022 occurred alongside persistent humanitarian crises and forced displacement associated with the conflict and other serious human rights violations, as illustrated by the conflicts in South Sudan and Afghanistan, with especially serious violations of women's rights in the latter. The conflicts in Egypt (Sinai) and Thailand (south) continued to be considered armed conflicts despite the fact that the body count fell below the threshold of 100 per year due to the relative dip in violence in 2023, which seemed to be more related to circumstantial issues in Thailand (south) and to signs of the withdrawal (but not the disappearance) of armed groups linked to ISIS in Egypt (Sinai). In Egypt, the crisis in Gaza added even more uncertainty about the future security situation in Sinai.

In 2023, the **most intense armed conflicts** continued to account for 47% of the total. **Thus the trend observed in recent years was maintained and there was an increase in the percentage of high-intensity conflicts**, characterised by high levels of lethality (over 1,000 fatalities per year), in addition to serious impacts on the population, mass

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14. For more information, see chapter 6 (Peace negotiations in the Middle East) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

forced displacement and severe consequences on the ground. If we consider the data since 2011 (see Graph 1.4), high-intensity armed conflicts once accounted for less than one third of all conflicts worldwide, except in 2016 and 2017, when they stood at 40%. Since 2020, the percentage of high-intensity conflicts around the world has increased, reaching around half the total: 47% in 2020, 53% in 2021, 52% in 2022 and 47% in 2023. Therefore, in 2023 they were slightly fewer than in 2022, but the trend was upheld overall. In line with what was observed in previous years, the highest proportion of high-intensity conflicts raged in Africa with 10 out of 17, meaning 59% worldwide. This is less than in 2022, when 70% of the high-intensity conflicts took place in Africa. Ten of the 18 armed conflicts in Africa were of high intensity (55%), a significant decrease from the 75% in 2022 and the 80% in 2021. The region with the second-highest number of high-intensity armed conflicts was the Middle East, with four, accounting for 23% of the world total and two thirds (67%) of the armed conflicts in the region (four of six). In Asia, the number of high-intensity armed conflicts doubled from one to two over the previous year, while in Europe there was still only one (50% of the conflicts there) and there were none in the Americas. **The 17 high-intensity armed conflicts in 2023 were:** Ethiopia (Amhara), Ethiopia (Oromia), Mali, Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram), Western Sahel region, DRC (East), DRC (East-ADF), Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Myanmar, Pakistan, Russia-Ukraine, Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Syria and Yemen.

As in previous years, **some of the high-intensity armed conflicts presented a pattern of hostilities and dynamics of violence that cost well above the threshold of a thousand lives per year**, in addition to other serious impacts on human security and repercussions on infrastructure and on the ground. In the **DRC**, for example, the escalation of violence in the five eastern provinces of the country (Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu, Maniema and Tanganyika) killed almost 3,500 people. The resumption of the war in northern **Mali** contributed to an increase in violence in the country that caused more than 4,000 deaths. In **Somalia**, the intensification of attacks by jihadist groups contributed to an annual death toll of almost 8,000 victims. The outbreak of a new armed conflict in **Sudan** in April pitting the Sudanese Armed Forces against the paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and involving other armed actors killed more than 13,000 people across the country in 2023, especially in the capital and in the states of the Darfur region. A similar death toll was caused by violence in the **Western Sahel region**, in what is known as the "three borders" area (Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger), where around 13,500 people died in 2023. An even higher body count was reported in **Myanmar**, where over 15,000 people lost their lives in 2023, especially starting in October with the escalation of clashes between Burmese security forces and different ethnic armed groups. In the war between **Russia and Ukraine**, some cited nearly 2,000

In 2023, almost half (47%) the armed conflicts in the world were of high intensity

Graph 1.2. **Intensity of the armed conflicts in 2023**
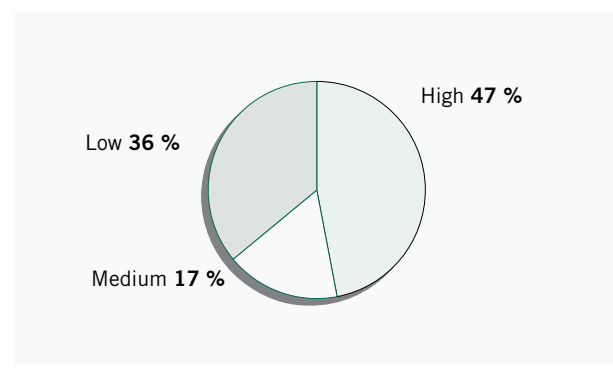
Graph 1.3. **Intensity of the armed conflicts by region**
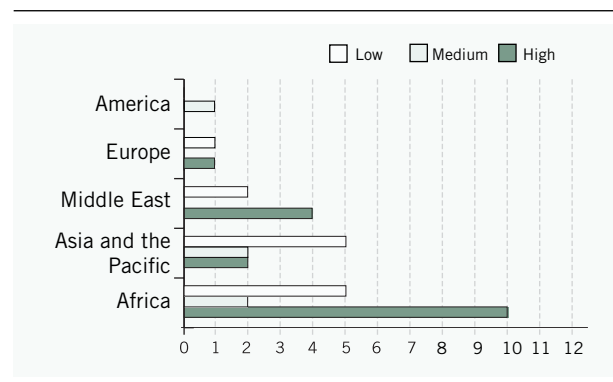
Graph 1.4. **Percentage of high intensity armed conflicts in the last decade**
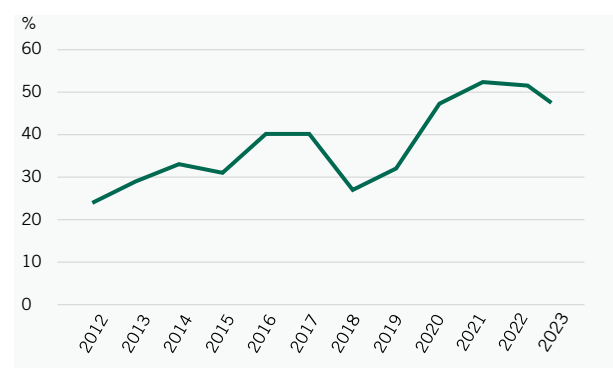
civilian deaths due to the violence of the conflict, acknowledging that the real figure could be higher, while others estimated that over 30,000 people in total had died during the year, including civilians and combatants.

The armed conflicts in the Middle East continued to be very bloody, with over 6,000 deaths in **Syria** in 2023 and more than 3,000 in **Yemen**. These are high figures, but comparatively much lower than those reported in the worst years of these conflicts, as in Syria they surpassed 50,000 in 2016 and 2015 and 70,000 in 2014, and in Yemen they held steady at around 20,000 in 2019, 2020 and 2021. The **Israel-Palestine** conflict deserves

Box 1.1. **Regional trends in armed conflict**

AFRICA	• Following the trend of previous years, Africa had the highest number of armed conflicts worldwide with 18, accounting for 50% of the total. • The proportion of high-intensity armed conflicts in Africa fell significantly from 75% in 2022 to 55% in 2023 (10 of 18). • Half the armed conflicts in the region (9 of 18) worsened over the previous year; while the situation in six conflicts did not change. A significant decrease in violence was observed in three conflicts, including in Ethiopia (Tigray), which was no longer considered an armed conflict in 2023. • The vast majority of the armed conflicts in Africa were internationalised internal in nature (13 of 18, or 72%), while the conflicts in the Western Sahel region and in the DRC (east) were international. The remaining three were purely internal: Ethiopia (Oromia), Ethiopia (Amhara) and the DRC (west). The last two of these three were new armed conflicts in 2023.
AMERICA	• There was only one armed conflict in the Americas, in Colombia, one of the longest-lasting in the world. • In 2023, the armed conflict in Colombia remained at medium intensity, with relatively high levels of violence despite the ceasefire agreements that the government has reached with several active armed groups and the negotiations with the ELN and EMC. • Although only one armed conflict was reported in the Americas, the region continued to report very high levels of violence as a result of other dynamics of tension and crime and stood out for its high homicide rates.[15]
ASIA AND THE PACIFIC	• After Africa, Asia had the second-highest number of armed conflicts, with nine in total (25%). • There were two high-intensity armed conflicts in Asia in 2023 (Myanmar and Pakistan) and two of medium intensity (Afghanistan and Pakistan (Balochistan)), yet most (five of nine) were of low intensity. Some of the low-intensity conflicts are decades old, like those in the Philippines (NPA) and India (CPI-M). • Most of the armed conflicts in Asia witnessed lower or similar levels of violence compared to the previous year (four and two, respectively). One third of the armed conflicts worsened: the two high-intensity ones in Myanmar and Pakistan and the other conflict in Pakistan (Balochistan). • Asia continued to stand out for its internal armed conflicts. One third of the armed conflicts in Asia (three of nine) were of this kind: the Philippines (NPA), India (CPI-M) and Thailand (south).
EUROPE	• Europe was the scene of two armed conflicts, Russia-Ukraine and Türkiye (south-east), accounting for 5% of all conflicts worldwide. • The armed conflict caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine presented high levels of violence similar to those of the previous year. In Türkiye (south-east), there was a notable drop in the death toll associated with the hostilities between government forces and the PKK. This decrease was partly linked to the PKK's unilateral cessation of hostilities in response to the serious earthquake that shook the region.
MIDDLE EAST	• Six armed conflicts were reported in the region, one more than the previous year, due to the escalation of violence between Israel and Hezbollah linked to the Gaza crisis. Armed conflicts in the Middle East accounted for 17% of the world total. • The Middle East was the region with the second-highest number of high-intensity armed conflicts, trailing Africa. Proportionally, it was the area most affected in the world by high-intensity conflict. Four of the six conflicts in the region (67%) were of high intensity in 2023. • Violence ebbed in half the conflicts compared to previous years. The other half escalated, and this was especially significant in the conflict in Israel-Palestine.

special mention after the steep escalation in violence starting in the last quarter of 2023. The unprecedented attack by Hamas and other Palestinian groups on 7 October and the subsequent Israeli military offensive on the Gaza Strip led to the death of more than 34,000 people in just three months: nearly 1,200 in Israel (including both Israelis and foreigners) and 33,000 in Gaza, with 25,000 confirmed dead and another 8,000 buried under the rubble, in addition to over 500 other Palestinian deaths in the West Bank throughout of the year. This conflict stands out not only for its very serious impacts on civilians, as the Israeli military operation in Gaza became a form of collective punishment and was increasingly described as genocide (see the next section), but also for the extraordinary magnitude of the violence and destruction in a limited period of time. Israel used weapons with enormous destructive potential in Gaza, wreaking havoc in a territory covering only 365 square kilometres that is among the most

densely populated in the world. **At the end of the year, analysts warned that the daily death rate in Gaza due to the Israeli offensive was higher than that of any other armed conflict in the world in the 21st century**.

1.2.2. Impact of conflicts on the civilian population

In line with what was observed in previous years, and as both the United Nations and other international and local organisations have insistently reported, the civilian population continued to suffer very serious consequences from the armed conflicts in 2023. The impacts of the armed conflicts were also interrelated with other crises, such as the climate emergency, food insecurity and inequality, aggravating the violations of rights and the general situation of human security in these contexts. The annual report of the UN Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict,

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15. See the section on the Americas in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises).

published in May 2023 and analysing the events of 2022, confirmed the consequences that death, injury, forced disappearance, torture, rape and forced displacement had for civilians. The report also asserted that the destruction of essential health, power, sanitation and water infrastructure deprived many thousands of people of access to basic services to survive.

The report also warned of the **impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, with devastating effects on the civilian population.** Thus, the highest number of civilian victims of these weapons in 2022 were in Ukraine, followed by Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria. The use of antipersonnel mines was also documented in the conflicts in the CAR, Colombia, the DRC, Myanmar, Ukraine and Yemen, and cluster bombs were used in Ukraine. In late 2022, Syria and Iraq suffered from extensive contamination of remnants of explosives. In Iraq, it was estimated that explosive devices were responsible for a third of civilian casualties. The analysis of armed conflicts in 2023 in this issue of the *Alert!* report illustrate how this problem has persisted and worsened in many conflicts. In Colombia, the use of antipersonnel mines continued to claim lives. In Ukraine, long-range explosive weapons were responsible for 84% of civilian deaths and 95% of civilian injuries. **One of the most notorious and symbolic cases of this in 2023 was that of Gaza, due to the use of weapons with enormous destructive potential in a densely populated area with no way out for the population**. During the first few months of the Israeli campaign, the Israeli Army dropped 25,000 tonnes of bombs on Gaza, equivalent to two nuclear bombs. Many of the various targets were identified via artificial intelligence systems. Israel also reportedly used weapons prohibited in populated areas, such as white phosphorus. As a result of these indiscriminate and deliberate attacks, the intensification of the blockade, the denial of access to humanitarian aid, including the use of hunger as a weapon of war, and the systematic destruction of civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, more than 33,000 people had died in Gaza by the end of the year, 70% of them women and children. The Israeli attacks also led to the deaths of more than a hundred journalists and humanitarian workers.

Faced with these continuous and systematic violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), some warned of the erosion of the international system to protect civilians and of double standards when punishing those responsible for these types of violations.[16] These serious impacts of armed violence on civilians in many conflicts also occurred amidst **growing militarisation and increased military spending worldwide**. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), a benchmark in this area, found that military spending had increased for the ninth consecutive year to reach 2.44 trillion USD in 2023.[17]

Armed conflicts also caused and/or worsened humanitarian crises and continued to be one of the main factors behind hunger crises in the world due to the destruction of crops, agricultural machinery and soil contamination with explosives. The rise in the prices of food, fuel and fertilisers, greatly influenced by the war between Russia and Ukraine, in addition to the effects of climate change, aggravated civilians' needs in many contexts. As part of the war between Russia and Ukraine, the explosion of the Kakhovka dam in Kherson (in an area occupied by Russia in southern Ukraine) caused an ecological and humanitarian catastrophe, flooding large areas, contaminating water, displacing explosive mines and causing extensive damage to agricultural areas. **Some armed conflicts were interrelated with phenomena such as climate change caused by human activity and natural disasters, which helped to worsen the situations faced by civilians** and especially had an impact on people's living conditions. In 2023, the dynamics of violence in Somalia deteriorated alongside the worse drought in decades in the country, followed by the largest floods in several generations. This combination of factors led to a deterioration in the humanitarian situation and an increase in levels of food insecurity. In Libya, torrential rains caused by a storm (Daniel) and linked to climate change led to the destruction of a dam and the death and disappearance of thousands of people in Derna (east), in a context marked by the impacts of the armed conflict, the persistent institutional fracture and serious governance problems. The humanitarian situation caused by the prolonged armed conflict in Colombia was also aggravated by the effects of climate change in 2023, due to droughts and floods that affected different areas. A similar situation was observed in Myanmar, considered one of the countries at highest risk of extreme weather events. In Syria, the interrelation between armed conflict and natural disasters was evident in the impacts of the earthquake that shook the region and Türkiye in February. The earthquake especially affected northwestern Syria, which is controlled by the opposition and home to hundreds of thousands of people internally displaced due to the armed conflict. The Syrian regime attempted to control and politically exploit humanitarian aid to the region, widely described as insufficient by multiple actors.

The armed conflicts also continued to have **specific impacts on some population groups**. In his periodic reports on the consequences of conflicts on civilians, the UN Secretary-General warned of **the disproportionate effects suffered by older people, who often cannot leave areas affected by hostilities** and are forced to face increased risk of death, injury or lack of access to basic services or support networks. The UN Secretary-General's periodic report on children and armed conflict published in mid-2023, covering events in 2022, noted a rise in the number of serious violations against boys and girls.[18]

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16. See "Gaza, the erosion of international humanitarian law and the future of the global order" in chapter 5 (Risk scenarios).
17. SIPRI, "Global military spending surges amid war, rising tensions and insecurity", Press Release, 22 April 2024.
18. UN Secretary-General, *Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict*, A/77/895-S/2023/363, 5 June 2023.

While 23,982 serious violations had been confirmed in 2021, 27,180 were documented in 2022, 24,300 of which were committed over the course of 2022 and 2,880 had been perpetrated before, but were finally verified in 2022. These violations affected nearly 19,000 minors, most of which were children, in 24 contexts. The report asserts that the information provided does not reflect all the violations committed against boys and girls in armed conflicts worldwide, but it does outline the trends of the most serious violations. Therefore, **the most serious violations committed against boys and girls included murder, mutilation, recruitment, kidnapping and detention due to their real or imagined connection with armed groups. Gender norms shaped the minors' exposure to these impacts**. As such, boys continued to be most affected by recruitment, mutilation and abduction, while girls were disproportionately affected by sexual violence related to the armed conflicts. The report warned of the particular impact on boys and girls in 2022 in Myanmar, where the hostilities contributed to a 140% rise in serious violations, in South Sudan, where the dynamics of violence caused 135% more serious violations against minors, and the Western Sahel region, where serious violations rose by 85%. Other armed conflicts that saw more violations against minors in 2022 were in Colombia, Israel-Palestine, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Syria and Sudan. The UN-backed truce reached in Yemen in 2022 helped to lower such violations by 40%, underscoring the importance of peace work to guarantee children's safety. On a positive note, nearly 12,500 minors previously linked to armed forces or groups received protection or support for their reintegration in 2022.

In just three months in Gaza, nearly 10,000 Palestinian girls and boys died as a result of Israel's offensive, more than all the minors who have lost their lives in armed conflicts worldwide since 2019

The trend of the armed conflicts in 2023 indicates persistent abuse and human rights violations against minors in multiple contexts. Boys and girls were directly affected by attacks in Burundi, Myanmar, Ukraine, Syria and elsewhere. In Syria, 307 minors died in various acts of violence in 2023, raising to 24,000 the total number of boys and girls who have lost their lives in the conflict since it started in 2011. In just the last three months of 2023 in Gaza, nearly 10,000 Palestinian girls and boys died as a result of Israel's offensive, more than all the minors who have lost their lives in armed conflicts worldwide since 2019. Thousands of other children were injured and/or underwent operations without anaesthesia, including amputations, and faced serious consequences for their mental health due to persistent attacks, continued insecurity, the loss of their parents and other relatives and the severe humanitarian crisis. Several Israeli minors were also taken hostage by Hamas on 7 October and Palestinian minors were also deprived of liberty under the controversial figure of administrative detention. There was an increase in armed groups' recruitment and use of girls and boys in several conflicts. In Colombia, for example, 251 minors were affected in 2023, an increase of 93% over 2022. In 2023, there were also warnings of the increased recruitment of minors in Yemen by the Houthis and the use of children by tribal militias supporting Egyptian government forces in their fight against ISIS in Sinai. In northeastern Syria, over 51,000 people, mostly women and children under 12 years of age, remained in the al-Hawl and Roj refugee camps due to their links to ISIS.

As in previous years, **sexual violence** continued to be perpetrated in many armed conflicts. The annual report of the UN Secretary-General on sexual violence in armed conflicts published in 2023, which documents and analyses events that occurred in 2022, noted some especially worrying trends and warned of the **serious effects of the use of sexual violence in Ukraine, Afghanistan, Mali, Myanmar, Sudan, the DRC, Ethiopia, Haiti and South Sudan**.[19] The report identified 49 actors as perpetrators of sexual violence in different conflicts, most of them non-state armed groups, although cases involving the national armed forces and security forces were also reported. The report states that 70% of these actors are considered persistent perpetrators, appearing on the list for five years or more and failing to take any corrective or reparatory action. Sexual violence was used as part of political and repressive violence in different armed conflicts and socio-political crises and was one of the causes of forced displacement. In that way, it also affected previous displaced populations given the vulnerability faced by women forced to leave their places of origin.

In 2023, the year that marked the 15th anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1820, which kicked off a series of resolutions specifically focused on sexual violence as part of the international agenda on women, peace and security, the information available indicated that the problem persisted in many contexts. In Somalia, rates of sexual violence continued to climb, following a worsening trend that has particularly intensified since 2020. Sexual violence also continued in the various armed conflicts taking place in the DRC, where armed actors such as the ADF maintained their systematic abuse of kidnapped girls and women as sex slaves. In the war between Russia and Ukraine, various actors continued to report and document the use of sexual violence in 2023, mainly perpetrated by Russian forces. In 2023, there were also warnings about sexual violence in South Sudan and Yemen. Overall, the United Nations reported that between 70% and 90% of all episodes of sexual violence in armed conflicts occur with the use of light weapons, confirming the need to address the impacts of these types of arms.[20]

19. UN Secretary-General, *Conflict-related sexual violence. Report of the Secretary-General*, S/2023/413, 22 June 2023.
20. Ibid.

Ukraine
714,000

Syria
174,000

Lebanon
139,000

Palestine
3,438,000

Israel
203,000

Mali
152,000

Mexico
11,000

Haiti
245,000

Sudan
6,039,000

Burkina Faso
707,000

CAR
214,000

Cameroon
164,000

Colombia
293,000

Brazil
16,000

Pakistan
2,800

India
67,000

Myanmar
1,298,000

Yemen
80,000

Ethiopia
794,000

South Sudan
282,000

Somalia
673,000

Philippines
160,000

Indonesia
2,200

DRC
3,772,000

Mozambique
41,000
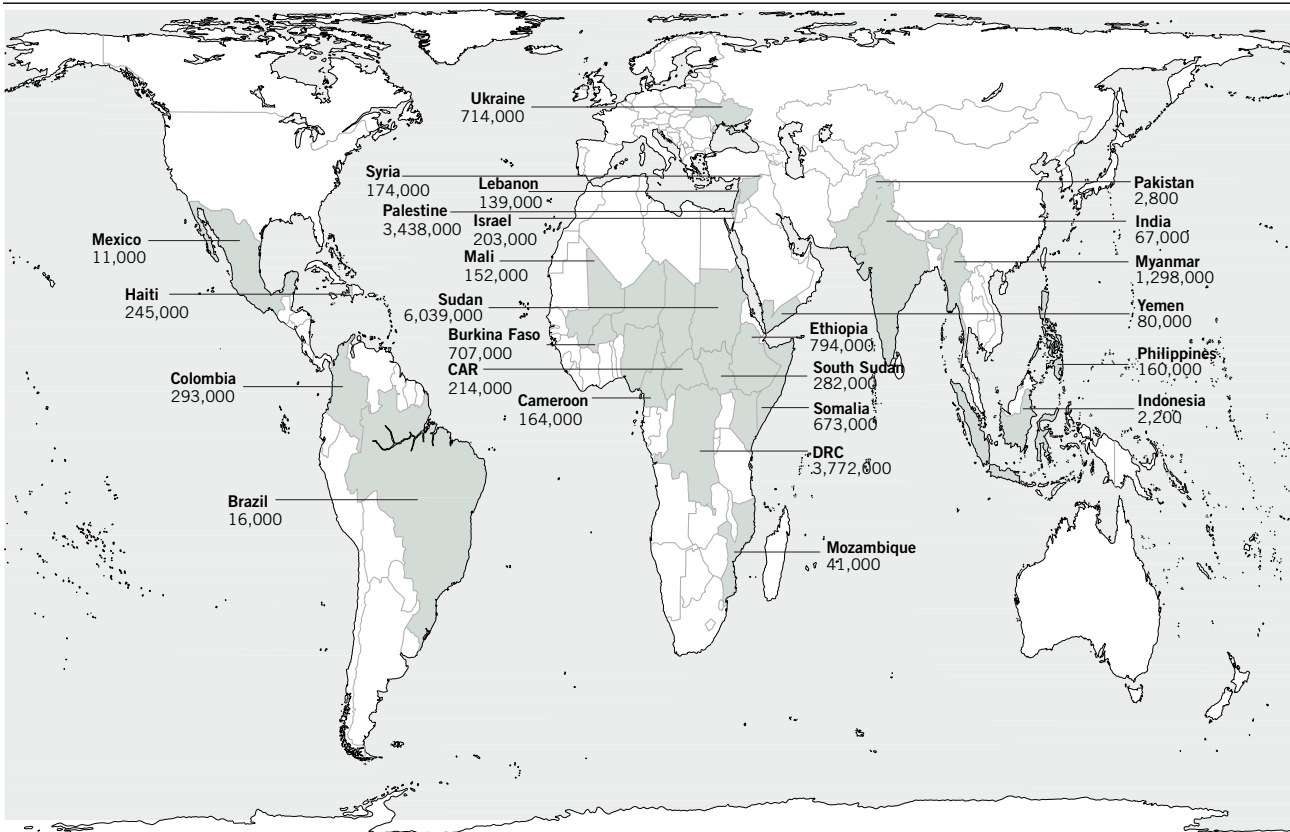
Source: Map prepared by the authors on the basis of the data provided in Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2024,* 14 May, 2024.

Forced displacement continued to be one of the most flagrant and dramatic effects of the armed conflicts, compromising the lives of millions of people around the world. According to data gathered by the United Nations agency for refugees (UNHCR), the phenomenon only worsened in 2023, once again breaking record numbers. In the first half of 2023,[21] 110 million people had been forcibly displaced inside or outside the borders of their countries as a result of conflicts, violence, persecution and human rights violations. Of this total, 36.4 million people were refugees, 62.5 million were internally displaced, 6.1 million were asylum seekers and another 5.3 million were categorised as people in need of international protection.[22] In mid-2023, more than half (52%) the world's **refugees** came from just three countries torn by armed conflict: Syria (6.5 million people), Afghanistan (6.1 million) and Ukraine (5.9 million). Syria continued to have the largest refugee and internally displaced populations, as it has for a decade, with a total of 13.3 million people. It is estimated that 88% of the total forcibly displaced population worldwide lived in low- and middle-income countries.

Considering the drift of events in various scenarios during the second half of the year, the accumulated

The worst forced displacement crisis in 2023 occurred in Sudan, where escalating violence since April forced more than 7.5 million people to leave their homes

numbers of forcibly displaced people worldwide were expected to be even higher by the end of 2023. Yearly data from various armed conflicts indicated this trend. Thus, the UNHCR reported that more than 3.1 million people had been forcibly displaced due to violence around Lake Chad. Since the violence intensified in Sudan in April and until the end of 2023, more than 7.5 million people were displaced due to the conflict in what was shaping up to be the worst displacement crisis of 2023. Affected by various armed conflicts, the DRC was also considered as having one of the worst humanitarian and displacement crises in 2023 according to the IOM, with seven million people displaced as a result of violence. UNHCR's partial assessment was also prepared before the crisis in the Gaza Strip, where the Israeli military offensive had forcibly displaced 1.7 million people by the close of 2023. Although this figure is lower than in other conflicts, it accounts for the forced displacement of over 75% of the total population of Gaza (2.3 million people) to increasingly smaller areas in the midst of incessant bombing in just three months. In the last quarter of the year, hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah arising from the crisis in Gaza also forcibly displaced 100,000 Israelis who were

21. Only global data for the first half of 2023 was available when this report went to press.
22. UNHCR, *Mid-Year Trends 2023*, 25 October 2023.

evacuated indefinitely by the authorities from areas bordering Lebanon starting in October. Another 50,000 people in Lebanon were also forced to move.

According to IDMC's annual report, which focuses on the situation of the internally displaced population, by the end of 2023 a total of 68 million people had left their homes due to conflict and violence, a figure that has increased by 49% in the last five years. Conflicts and violence would have motivated internal population movements of more than 20 million people in 45 countries and territories in 2023. Sudan, DRC and Palestine represent almost two thirds of this total (see map 1.2).

1.3. Armed conflicts: annual evolution

1.3.1. Africa

Great Lakes and Central Africa

Burundi	
Start:	2015
Type:	Government Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, Imbonerakure youth wing, political party CNDD-FDD, political party CNL, armed groups RED-TABARA, FPB (previously FOREBU), FNL
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↑

Summary:

The process of political and institutional transition that got under way with the signing of the Arusha Peace Agreement in 2000 was formally completed in 2005. The approval of a new constitution (that formalises the distribution of political and military power between the main two communities, the Hutu and Tutsi) and the holding of elections (leading to the formation of a new government), represent an attempted to lay the foundations for overcoming a conflict that began in 1993. This represented the principal opportunity for ending the ethnic-political violence that has plagued the country since its independence in 1962. However, the authoritarian evolution of the government after the 2010 elections, denounced as fraudulent by the opposition, has overshadowed the reconciliation process and led to the mobilization of political opposition. This situation has been aggravated by the plans to reform the Constitution by the Government. The deteriorating situation in the country is revealed by the institutional deterioration and reduction of the political space for the opposition, the controversial candidacy of Nkurunziza for a third term and his victory in a fraudulent presidential election (escalating political violence), the failed coup d'état in May 2015, violations of human rights and the emergence of new armed groups. In 2020, the historic leader Pierre

Nkurunziza passed away, although the new leader, Domitien Ndayishimiye, had an approach towards the political and armed opposition similar to that of his predecessor.

The Burundian security forces continued their operations in the Congolese border province of South Kivu in pursuit of Burundian insurgents during the year and were also active in the Congolese province of North Kivu as part of the EAC's regional mission (EAC-RF) deployed to stop the armed group M23.[23] Sporadic insurgent activity continued on the border between Burundi and Rwanda and rebel operations inside the country increased in the latter part of the year. As such, counterinsurgency operations continued to be led by the Burundian Armed Forces and the Imbonerakure youth militias, the youth wing of the ruling party, the National Council for the Defence of Democracy-Forces for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD-FDD), in the Congolese province of South Kivu in pursuit of Burundian insurgents, especially the Tutsi armed group RED-Tabara, which has its bases in the DRC. In August 2022, Burundi had revealed the existence of a bilateral agreement between the DRC and Burundi that allowed the Burundian military to enter Congolese territory, though it had been reported that Burundian security forces were in the DRC to pursue the insurgents since late 2021.[24] Meanwhile, the armed group RED-Tabara, based in the DRC, carried out the first attacks in Burundi since 2021. The armed group has launched various attacks since September, including at the Bujumbura airport. In December, it battled with the Burundian Army in the province of Bubanza, killing three soldiers. On 22 December, it launched an attack on the city of Vugizo, near the Congolese border, killing 20, though both the government and RED-Tabara blamed each other for the incident. The government said that the attack claimed the lives of 19 civilians and a police officer, including 12 children, and that nine people were wounded. The RED-Tabara rebels claimed that nine soldiers and a police officer had been killed and that their attack targeted the Vugizo border post, so the civilian casualties had been caught in the crossfire with the Congolese security forces. These acts of violence also sparked new tensions with Rwanda after months of improving relations between the two countries. The Burundian armed group FNL, which is also active against Rwanda, carried out operations in Burundi near the Rwandan border that helped to raise tensions. In addition, the Burundian security forces carried out actions against Tutsi civilians in Cibitoke province in pursuit of RED-Tabara in their stronghold in the Kibira forest area in northwestern Burundi (bordering with Rwanda). In December, Burundian President Évariste Ndayishimiye accused Rwanda of financing and training RED-Tabara, which is of Tutsi origin and pro-Rwandan. Kigali denied the accusation and closed its borders with Burundi once again. The research centre ACLED counted 151 fatalities during 2023, fewer than in previous years

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23. See the summary on the DRC (east) in this chapter.
24. See the summary on Burundi in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Alert 2023! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2023.

(245 in 2022 and 285 in 2021).[25] These data show a slight improvement compared to previous years, though they do not take insurgent and counterinsurgent activity in the DRC into account. According to UNHCR, at the end of 2023 there were 259,129 Burundian refugees, especially in the DRC, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. This was roughly the same amount as the previous year, when there were 259,279 refugees.[26]

Meanwhile, the atmosphere of political violence continued with acts of repression, arbitrary arrests and forced disappearances of members of the political opposition by the security forces and the Imbonerakure. Opposition leader Kefa Nibizi was arrested in October and there were acts of violence and repression against members of the CNL party, led by Agathon Rwasa, throughout the year. In April, former Prime Minister Guillaume Bunyoni was arrested on charges of plotting a coup d'état in 2022. His trial took place during the year and ended in December with a life sentence handed down by the Supreme Court. Human rights organisations had requested in vain that the investigation include the serious human rights violations committed by the security forces under his government between 2015 and 2020. In October, the UN Commission on Human Rights extended the mandate of the special rapporteur for Burundi for another year, citing the persistence of serious human rights violations in the country. The rapporteur's annual report described the gradual shrinking of public space and the growing pressure on political parties, civil society organisations and the media in view of the legislative and municipal elections of 2025. Moreover, members of the ruling party, the CNDD-FDD, said they supported eliminating ethnic quotas in the public sector as established by the 2018 Constitution and the Arusha Agreement of 2000. Doing so would legitimise the complete exclusion of the Tutsi minority, since members of the Hutu community currently occupy most positions in the public sector.

CAR	
Start:	2006
Type:	Government, Resources Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government of CAR, armed groups that are members of the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC, made up of anti-balaka factions led by Mokom and Ngaïssona, 3R, FPRC, MPC and UPC), opposition armed coalition Siriri, ethnic militia AAKG, other local and foreign armed groups, France, MINUSCA, Rwanda, Russia, Wagner Group
Intensity:	2
Trend:	=

Summary:
Since independence in 1960, the situation in the Central African Republic has been characterised by continued political instability, which has resulted in several coups and military dictatorships. The keys to the situation are of an internal and external nature. Internal, because there is a confrontation between political elites from northern and southern ethnic groups who are competing for power and minorities that have been excluded from it. A number of leaders have attempted to establish a system of patronage to ensure their political survival. And external, due to the role played by its neighbours Chad and Libya; due to its natural resources (diamonds, uranium, gold, hardwoods) and the awarding of mining contracts in which these countries compete alongside China and the former colonial power, France, which controls uranium. Conflicts in the region have led to the accumulation of weaponry and combatants who have turned the country into regional sanctuary. This situation has been compounded by a religious dimension due to the fact that the Séléka coalition, which is a Muslim faith organisation formed by a number of historically marginalised groups from the north and which counts foreign fighters amongst its ranks, took power in March 2013 after toppling the former leader, François Bozizé, who for the past 10 years had fought these insurgencies in the north. The inability of the Séléka leader, Michel Djotodia, to control the rebel coalition, which used violence to control the country and has committed gross violations of human rights, looting and extrajudicial executions, has led to the emergence of Christian militias ("anti-balaka"). These militias and sectors of the army, as well as supporters of former President Bozizé, have rebelled against the government and Séléka, creating a climate of chaos and widespread impunity. France, the AU and the UN intervened militarily to reduce the clashes and facilitate the process of dialogue that would lead to a negotiated transition, forcing a transitional government that led to the 2015-2016 elections. After a brief period of reduced instability and various peace agreements, armed groups continued to control most of the country. Neither the reduced Central African security forces (which barely controlled Bangui) nor MINUSCA were able to reverse the situation. New initiatives by the AU and ECCAS helped to reach the February 2019 peace agreement. However, some groups pulled out of the agreement in late 2020 and started a new rebellion, the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC). The government's inability to deal with the situation prompted it to request bilateral support from Rwanda and the Russian security company Wagner, which increased the complexity of the situation due to the proliferation of armed actors in the country.

Fighting continued during the year, especially in the east, where government security forces were scarce and the Russian private security company Wagner was active against the main armed groups affiliated with the rebel coalition known as the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC). The violence forcibly displaced thousands of people and serious human rights violations against civilians were reportedly perpetrated by all actors in the armed conflict. According to the UN, security problems persisted due to clashes between armed groups, the limited authority of the state in areas far from the capital and cross-border insecurity. The UN called for an inclusive dialogue ahead of the

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25. ACLED, Dashboard [Viewed on 10 January 2024].
26. UNHCR, Operational Data Portal, Burundi, 31 January 2024.

local elections scheduled to be held in October 2024, but the government rejected the idea. According to the research centre ACLED, in 2023 there were 299 violent events (battles, violence against civilians and improvised explosive devices) that cost the lives of 581 people, significantly fewer than in 2022 (837) and 2021 (1,700), in the aftermath of the attempted coup d'état and rebel offensive that gained strong momentum in late 2020 and early 2021.[27] According to UNHCR data, at the end of 2023 more than 754,147 people were refugees in neighbouring countries and 511,803 were displaced inside the country. These figures are similar to those of 2022.[28]

Security conditions remained unstable throughout the country, especially in the east and in Haut Mbomou prefecture (south-east). The deployment of Central African security forces remained limited and a newly created ethnic militia, Azande Ani Kpi Gbe (AAKG), harassed Fulani and Muslim communities with threats, kidnappings of civilians and other activities due to its alleged collusion with Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC) insurgents. On 20 June, the AAKG was involved in a firefight with the UPC in Mboki that resulted in the deaths of 48 AAKG militiamen, four UPC fighters and five civilians. The crisis in Sudan caused security conditions to deteriorate in the border area, especially around Am Dafok, and this situation was compounded by the influx of refugees into the area. In the centre-east, in Haut-Kotto prefecture, violence intensified between the armed coalition CPC and the national security forces supported by Wagner. In the west, anti-balaka militias and the 3R group continued to attack civilians, limiting their freedom of movement and displacing them alongside counterinsurgency operations conducted by private security forces. Meanwhile, the indiscriminate use of ammunition and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) increased during the year, causing dozens of fatalities. Security conditions did improve in the capital, Bangui, and the national curfew was lifted on 7 July, after which the government increased the number of mobile checkpoints in the city to prevent criminal activities. In the north, the Siriri coalition, a political and armed group composed of several rebel militias, continued to carry out armed attacks from its bases in the prefectures of Vakaga and Bamingui-Bangoran. At the beginning of the year, the Siriri coalition announced plans to overthrow Touadéra's government.

The CAR remained a scenario of indirect geopolitical confrontation and of tension due to the presence of the international community through the UN mission in the country (MINUSCA), state security forces and private security companies. Wagner's rebellion in Russia[29] in July caused the withdrawal of hundreds of mercenaries from the prefectures of Vakaga, Mambere-Kadei, Ouham Pende and Bangui, which forced the Central African Armed Forces (FACA) to abandon several military bases.[30] In light of President Touadéra's attempts to diversify his sources of support for security, in December it became public that there was a military cooperation agreement between the government and the US private security company Bancroft Global Development. Thus, early in the year, President Touadéra and Sudanese Vice President Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo reached an agreement for the paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces (RSF) to operate in Vakaga prefecture to combat armed groups and capture their leaders in exchange for the concession of mining rights. Later, following the outbreak of armed clashes in April between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the RSF in Sudan, French and US intelligence services revealed that the Wagner Group had been sending military matériel from the CAR to the RSF in Sudan.

The political situation was dominated by the constitutional referendum that was held on 30 July. The seventh republic was formally established in the Central African Republic when the new Constitution was promulgated on 30 August. The government declared that the constitutional changes reflected popular demand and would allow national development. The political opposition and various civil society organisations, religious associations and various groups have criticised the new Constitution, some of whose provisions continued to cause controversy, such as those relating to the requirements to run for election. Some armed groups and opposition groups, such as the armed coalition CPC, called on the country's population to boycott the referendum. The opposition civil coalition Republican Bloc for the Defence of the Constitution, some civil society organisations and several armed groups that did not sign the 2019 political agreement challenged the results. In his speech to the nation on 31 August, President Touadera repeated his desire to carry out the peace process and the political transformation in the country, basing it on the new Constitution that had been promulgated the day before, and expressly invited the armed groups to rejoin the peace process. An observation mission from the regional organisation ECCAS noted that the conditions for the referendum had been satisfactory.

The new Constitution, which gives more power to the presidency and makes changes that could be interpreted as setbacks for independence between the powers of the state, extended the terms of office of the president and Parliament from five to seven years, eliminated the limitation of successive terms

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27. Although the figures for fatalities in 2023 are lower than the figures for 2022, our analysis of the trend of the conflict and its impacts compared the previous year does not indicate any improvement in the situation or significant change in trend.
28. UNHCR, Operational Data Portal - CAR Situation. [Viewed on 31 January 2024].
29. See the summary on Russia in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises).
30. ACLED, *Moving Out of the Shadows. Shifts in Wagner Group Operations Around the World*, 3 August 2023.

and withdrew parliamentary control from the signing of mining contracts. This prerogative is now in the hands of the president. The Constitution also limited the Senate, which had been established by the 2015 Constitution but had never been created. It also established the creation of a chamber of traditional leaders, among other issues. Finally, given the wave of coups d'état in Central and West Africa and rumours of an imminent coup d'état in the CAR after the one carried out in neighbouring Gabon in late August, which ousted President Ali Bongo Ondimba, in early September the Presidential Guard arrested several military officers, revealing growing divisions within the FACA, according to the International Crisis Group (ICG).

DRC (east)	
Start:	1998
Type:	Government, Identity, Resources International
Main parties:	DRC, Burundi, Angola, MONUSCO, EAC Regional Force (Burundi, Kenya, Uganda and South Sudan), SAMIDRC (regional force of the SADC, composed of troops from South Africa, Malawi and Tanzania), pro-government militias Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (VDP, known as Wazalendo, composed of dozens of former Mai Mai militias and other armed groups from North Kivu and South Kivu, like APCLS, PARECO-FF, Nyatura, Raïa Mutomboki), FDLR, FDLR splinter groups (CNRD-Ubwiyunge, RUD-Urunana), private security companies (Agemira RDC and Congo Protection); March 23 Movement (M23), Twirwaneho, Rwanda; other armed groups not part of Wazalendo, Burundian armed groups; armed group of Ugandan origin LRA; Ituri groups and community militias (including, CODECO/URDPC, FPIC, FRPI, MAPI, Zaïre-FPAC)
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑

Summary:
The current conflict has its origins in the coup d'état carried out by Laurent Desiré Kabila in 1996 against Mobutu Sese Seko, which culminated with him handing over power in 1997. Later, in 1998, Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda, together with various armed groups, tried to overthrow Kabila, who received the support of Angola, Chad, Namibia, Sudan and Zimbabwe, in a war that has caused around five million fatalities. The control and exploitation of the natural resources has contributed to the perpetuation of the conflict and to the presence of foreign armed forces.

The signing of a ceasefire in 1999, and of several peace agreements between 2002 and 2003, led to the withdrawal of foreign troops, the setting up of a transitional government and later an elected government, in 2006. However, did not mean the end of violence in this country, due to the role played by Rwanda and the presence of factions of non-demobilised groups and of the FDLR, responsible for the Rwandan genocide of 1994. The breach of the 2009 peace accords led to the 2012 desertion of soldiers of the former armed group CNDP, forming part of the Congolese army, who organised a new rebellion, known as the M23, supported by Rwanda. In December 2013 the said rebellion was defeated and part of its combatants took refuge in Rwanda and Uganda.. However, the M23 reorganised in 2022, causing an escalation of violence with the support of Rwanda, which worsened relations between the DRC and Rwanda.

Although the conflict in the eastern part of the country became less intense during the year, starting in October the armed group March 23 Movement (M23) expanded its offensive in North Kivu. Combined with the activity of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)[31] and other groups in the provinces of Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu, the M23's escalation in the last quarter of the year contributed to a general atmosphere of insecurity. The M23's offensive was directly linked to Rwanda's support, which the UN highlighted once again, gradually making it known throughout the international community. According to data collected by ACLED,[32] in 2023 there were 1,735 violent events (battles, violence against civilians and improvised explosive devices) in the country's five eastern provinces (Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu, Maniema and Tanganika) that claimed 3,409 lives. In the country as a whole, violence linked to the different conflicts fell compared to 2022. ACLED counted 3,907 deaths in around 2,000 episodes of violence across the country in 2023, so the M23's strategic pause was reflected in the partial reduction in fatalities for the year as a whole.[33] In 2022, there had been 6,145 fatalities as a result of the violence everywhere in the country, a higher body count than in 2021, when over 2,300 episodes of violence had been reported, causing 4,723 deaths in those five provinces alone. According to the UN, violence by armed groups claimed over 1,100 civilians' lives just in the province of Ituri from January to October 2023. This happened in the middle of an election campaign, marked by a growing climate of political violence running up to the general elections in the DRC on 20 December, in which President Félix Tshisekedi was re-elected for a second term after winning more than 73% of the votes with a turnout of 43%. The elections were plagued by irregularities and allegations of fraud that could have influenced the entire process, according to various analysts.[34]

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31. See the summary on the DRC (east-ADF) in this chapter.
32. ACLED, Dashboard [Viewed on 8 January 2024].
33. Although the death toll in 2023 is lower than it was in 2022, the analysis of the trend of the conflict compared to the previous year reflects a general worsening of the situation linked to the serious escalation of violence in the last part of the year and its different impacts.
34. See the DRC in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises).

Different diplomatic initiatives were launched to promote dialogue during the first quarter of the year (the efforts of Angola and Qatar[35] to reach a ceasefire failed) and the East African Community Regional Force (EAC-RF) was deployed in March. Composed of military personnel from Burundi, Kenya, Uganda and South Sudan, the EAC-RF lacked a mandate to use force. However, the M23 carried out a strategic withdrawal and reduced its activity as the EAC-RF completed its deployment, which culminated in April. In March, Angola also deployed 500 soldiers to North Kivu province to secure areas controlled by the M23. Between April and October, clashes between the government and the M23 group decreased, although the armed group continued to carry out sporadic attacks against local pro-government armed groups for control of territory in North Kivu. As a result of widespread violence, the illegal exploitation of natural resources increased, due diligence procedures collapsed in various mining sites recaptured by armed groups and smuggling to Rwanda grew again.

In its mid-term report, the UN Group of Experts corroborated Rwanda's interference in support of the M23 in the form of direct and active participation in hostilities against Congolese forces.[36] In December, the UN warned of the risk of a military confrontation between the DRC and Rwanda. The EU and the United States imposed sanctions on senior Rwandan and Congolese military officials and members of armed groups. The US also restricted military cooperation with Rwanda. In September, the M23 emerged from the low profile it had held for much of the year and announced on 18 September that it had taken over of the town of Kiwanja, which had nominally been under the control of the EAC-RF. In September, the mandate of the EAC-RF was extended by three months, although it played a token role on the ground. In October, the M23 resumed its offensive against the FARDC and the Wazalendo coalition of pro-government armed groups, launching armed attacks in different locations. The resumption of hostilities increased the hostile rhetoric between Kigali and Kinshasa, leading UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region Huang Xia to highlight the real risk of a direct conflict between Rwanda and the DRC due to both countries' mobilisation of troops, the absence of any direct high-level dialogue between them and the persistence of hate speech. During the Congolese election campaign, President Tshisekedi and other candidates used the conflict to mobilise the population in the eastern part of the country, promising to attack Rwanda if they won.

Accusations of fraud in a climate of electoral political violence threatened to further destabilise the DRC while the war in the east raged in the background

The fighting that resumed in October caused a catastrophic humanitarian situation and internally displaced more than one million people (reaching almost seven million internally displaced people (IDPs) in 2023), in addition to the one million existing refugees. This internal displacement figure (UNHCR had documented 5.76 million IDPs in 2022 and 5.6 million IDPs in 2021) led the IOM to state that the DRC was facing one of the world's worst humanitarian and displacement crises.

The offensive also added to the general climate of violence of the election campaign. During this period, there were different regional attempts to relaunch peace negotiations and international pressure on Rwanda increased, though the Luanda and Nairobi dialogue processes that began in 2022 remained at an impasse.[37] The United States tried to promote a ceasefire during the elections and had been facilitating contacts between the DRC and Rwanda since mid-November. A three-day truce came into force on 11 December[38] that applied to state and non-state actors in certain areas and routes in the eastern part of the country. Supported by the DRC and Rwanda, it was later extended for two weeks. Various sources indicated that the truce was monitored unevenly and that it was used by the M23 to reinforce its positions around Sake, with support from Rwanda. Criticised for its ineffectiveness throughout the year, the EAC-RF withdrew from the country at the request of the Congolese government, completing its departure on 21 December.

Burundian troops denied accusations that they had been fighting the Rwandan-backed armed group M23 in the DRC in support of the FARDC and Congolese militias, rather than respecting the mandate of the EAC-RF. The mandate of the EAC mission, made up of troops from Uganda, Kenya, Burundi and South Sudan, was to recapture positions previously occupied by M23 rebels after defeating FARDC soldiers and to establish a buffer zone to prevent further fighting between the M23 and the FARDC. On 11 December, the FARDC reported that all the soldiers of the Burundian contingent deployed in the eastern DRC as part of the EAC-RF had returned to Burundi after the force's mandate ended. The Congolese government decided not to renew its mandate because it had not fought the M23 and the civilian population had accused it of remaining passive in the face of the M23's activity. On the same day, the FARDC declined to comment on

35. Qarjouly, Asmahan, "Violence in DRC intensifies as Qatar takes steps to mediate", *Doha News*, 20 March 2023.
36. UN Security Council, *Final report of the Group of Experts, in accordance with paragraph 9 of resolution 2641 (2022)*, 13 June 2023.
37. See the summary on the DRC in chapter 2 (Peace negotiations in Africa) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.
38. Reuters, "Exclusive: Eastern Congo ceasefire extended for two weeks, US official says", *Reuters*, 15 December 2023.

allegations that Burundian troops had been deployed to the DRC as part of a bilateral agreement between Kinshasa and Gitega, including several accounts of Burundian soldiers wearing FARDC uniforms and fighting M23 rebels backed by Rwanda. However, sources close to the FARDC, corroborated by multiple sources, reported that 1,070 Burundian Armed Forces personnel dressed in FARDC uniforms had been covertly deployed along the Sake-Kitchanga road since early October 2023 to secure Masisi territory against attacks by the M23 and Rwanda, together with the FARDC and Wazalendo. The deployment was carried out outside the framework of the EAC-RF. Meanwhile, since March the Congolese government and South Africa had been negotiating the deployment of a Southern African Development Community (SADC) force in the area to cooperate with the FARDC's combat operations against the M23. In May, the SADC approved the deployment of the SADC Mission in the DRC (SAMIDRC), which became effective on 15 December 2023.

Days before the elections, a new political and military coalition, Alliance Fleuve Congo, was created in Kenya.[39] Led by the former president of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), Corneille Nangaa, it allied with the armed group M23 and other groups from the eastern DRC. The intention of the new group, explained in a statement that Nangaa released from the M23's stronghold in Rutshuru (North Kivu), was to overthrow Tshisekedi's government. Kinshasa convened a meeting with the Kenyan ambassador to the DRC and recalled its ambassador to Kenya for consultations in protest, since Kenya was part of the EAC-RF and of regional mediation efforts. Moreover, the withdrawal of MONUSCO began in early 2024. Requested by the DRC, the withdrawal completed its first stage with the departure of 2,000 UN peacekeepers from the country. Demonstrations accusing MONUSCO of inaction and passivity before the escalation of violence prompted the intervention of the Congolese security forces. In August, Congolese security forces cracked down on an anti-MONUSCO protest staged by a religious group in Goma, killing 43 people, injuring 56 and arresting 150. This degree of repression sent a message to the entire country that the space for the freedom of expression and dissent was shrinking in the period prior to the general elections in late 2023, according to the ICG.

The DRC faced one of the world's worst humanitarian and displacement crises, according to the IOM

DRC (east - ADF)	
Start:	2014
Type:	System, Resources Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government of the DRC, government of Uganda, Mai-Mai militias, armed opposition group ADF, MONUSCO
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=

Summary:

The Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (ADF-NALU) is an Islamist rebel group operating in the northwest of the Rwenzori massif (North Kivu, between DR Congo and Uganda) with between 1,200 and 1,500 Ugandan and Congolese militiamen recruited mainly in both countries as well as in Tanzania, Kenya and Burundi. It is the only group in the area considered a terrorist organisation and is included on the US list of terrorist groups. It was created in 1995 from the merger of other Ugandan armed groups taking refuge in DR Congo (Rwenzururu, ADF), later adopted the name ADF and follows the ideology of the former ADF, which originated in marginalised Islamist movements in Uganda linked to the conservative Islamist movement Salaf Tabliq. In its early years it was used by Zaire under Mobutu (and later by DR Congo under Kabila) to pressure Uganda, but it also received backing from Kenya and Sudan and strong underground support in Uganda. At first it wanted to establish an Islamic state in Uganda, but in the 2000s it entrenched in the communities that welcomed it in DR Congo and became a local threat to the administration and the Congolese population, though its activity was limited. In early 2013 the group began a wave of recruitment and kidnappings and an escalation of attacks against the civilian population. Since the start of the offensive by the Congolese Armed Forces in the region in 2019, there has been an escalation of violence with serious consequences for the civilian population.

As the second year has passed since the start of Operation Shujaa,[40] the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) continued their joint military operations with the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) against the Allied Defence Forces (ADF), primarily in Beni, North Kivu and southern Ituri. Multiple sources, including former ADF combatants and former ADF abductees, reported an increase in the pace of ADF operations starting in late 2022, particularly in Beni. According to the UN Group of Experts' report of December 2023,[41] the ADF continued to put up resistance, despite the intensification and geographic expansion of Operation Shujaa, which affected it. The UPDF had reportedly killed over 550 ADF fighters since the beginning of the operation and claimed that it would soon wipe the group out. According to the UPDF and Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, senior ADF

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39. Africanews, "DRC: Corneille Nangaa joins forces with M23 to create political platform", *Africanews*, 15 December 2023.
40. Operation Shujaa was a military offensive launched by the Ugandan Armed Forces (UPDF) on Congolese soil against the armed group Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in retaliation for the explosions in Kampala on 16 November 2021 for which the ADF claimed responsibility.
41. UN Security Council, *Letter dated 15 December 2023 from the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo addressed to the President of the Security Council*, S/2023/990, 30 December 2023.

leaders such as Mulalo and Meddie Nkalubo had been killed. However, the UN Group of Experts was unable to confirm these deaths. The ADF continued to move westwards to evade military pressure, adapting its tactics, operating in small mobile groups and carrying out sporadic attacks, especially in remote areas, along roads (particularly the Beni-Komanda-Mambasa national motorway) and in agricultural fields, taking advantage of the absence of state authority. According to the UN Group of Experts, the ADF's leaders decided to reduce attacks in the DRC, especially to gain the sympathy and support of the population, and to focus on attacks in Uganda. This led to intermittent pauses in ADF attacks in Ituri and particularly in Beni starting in July 2023.

Since December 2022, ADF fighters have periodically infiltrated Uganda, carrying out at least five deadly attacks, including one on a school in Mpondwe in June 2023 that claimed the lives of 37 students and seven civilians, making it the worst attack in Uganda since the Kasese massacre in November 2016, which killed 100 people. This marked an important turning point, since for over a decade ADF attacks had been concentrated mainly in the DRC. These recent attacks in Uganda were also operationally distinct from the targeted killings, improvised explosive device attacks and attempted attacks carried out on Ugandan soil in recent years and attributed to the ADF. All five attacks were carried out by ADF fighters operating in the DRC who had crossed the border into Uganda, unlike other attacks in which the ADF mobilised collaborators in Uganda to carry out killings or plant improvised explosive devices in the DRC. The recent ADF attacks in Uganda had a twofold objective: to retaliate for UDPF and FARDC operations and to shift the focus of those operations away from ADF areas in the DRC. The attacks were also allegedly intended to demonstrate that the ADF could still carry out large-scale, high-profile attacks and thereby embarrass the government of Uganda.[42]

Meanwhile, according to several different sources collected by the UN Group of Experts, internal tensions have risen within the ADF, especially between the central leaders and the ADF commanders stationed in Mwalika (North Kivu). The tensions also reflected some lines of division between ADF leaders from Uganda, especially historical commanders, and non-Ugandan leaders like Bonge la Chuma and some of the more radical ADF leaders who had joined the group more recently. For example, according to internal ADF sources, the Mpondwe attack in Uganda had been planned by ADF Commander Abwakasi without having received instructions or approval from ADF General Musa Baluku. Instead of using ideology to recruit fighters,

the ADF motivated its new collaborators mainly in the DRC and mostly with money and by encouraging them to co-opt new collaborators in turn, which allowed them to constantly renew their networks. They continued their recruitment campaign in the DRC and abroad and engaged in the systematic exploitation of kidnapped girls and women as sex slaves under commander supervision. In its June report,[43] the Group of Experts indicated that according to recent information, **ADF combatants had launched exploratory missions to new areas to expand their operations to the provinces of Kinshasa, Tshopo, Haut-Uélé and South Kivu**.

DRC (west)	
Start:	2023
Type:	Identity, Resources, Territory Internal
Main parties:	DRC, Teke community militias, Yaka and Suku community militias (including the armed group Mobondo) and other allied community militias
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑

Síntesis:

The origin of the conflict in the province of Mai-Ndombe (west) dates back to mid-2022 from a disagreement over a traditional tax (as part of customary law) on agricultural products established by the "native"[44] Teke community (considered the traditional landowners) who settled in the area before the "non-native" communities, mostly Yaka, but also Suku, Mbala and Songe (originally from the provinces of Kwango and Kwilu). These communities came to work as farmers on the Bateke plateau more than five decades ago. The farmers who arrived leased the land from the Teke chiefs in exchange for payment of this customary tax. Until recently, the communities lived together normally and bonds had been created between them. According to local sources collected by the UN, the first disagreements arose in 2021 and intensified in early 2022, when "non-native" communities refused to pay the increased tax. The Teke attempted to collect the tax by force, with the support of some local members of the Congolese National Police (PNC) and members of the FARDC, and Teke chiefs began telling farmers who did not want to pay to abandon their lands. In mid-2022, the first inter-community clashes broke out, which increased throughout 2023. The tax payment issue was soon transformed into one of land control and farmers, mainly from the Yaka community, began to claim the lands owned by the Teke. Another complaint from the Yaka farmers was that the Teke landowners had been selling the land to investors, even though it already belonged to the Yaka.[45] The Teke attacks against what they considered "non-native" communities provoked violent reprisals by the Yaka, who began to organise the armed group Mobondo, which was joined by members of other allied communities. During 2023, Mobondo raised its level of organisation, increased its military capabilities and carried out armed attacks.

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42. See the summary on Uganda in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises).
43. UN Security Council, *Final report of the Group of Experts, in accordance with paragraph 9 of resolution 2641 (2022)*, S/2023/431, 13 June 2023.
44. The terms "natives" and "non-natives" are used in the same way as the UN Group of Experts in its last two reports on the subject, S/2023/431 of 13 June 2023 and especially to Annex 2 of the report S/2023/990, 30 December 2023.
45. See Annex 2 of the report of the UN Group of Experts. UN Security Council, *Letter dated 15 December 2023 from the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo addressed to the President of the Security Council*, S/2023/990, 30 December 2023.

The outbreak of violence in mid-2022 in the territory of Kwamouth, in the western province of Mai-Ndombe, which pitted members of the Teke and Yaka communities against each other, intensified in 2023. Considered an armed conflict, it spread to the neighbouring provinces of Kwango, Kwilu, Kinshasa and Kongo Central, causing hundreds of fatalities. The violence threatened to surround Kinshasa, the capital, where members of the Teke and Yaka communities live, and displaced thousands of civilians. The emergence of Mobondo, an armed group of predominantly Yaka fighters, hampered reconciliation efforts. Both communities remained armed and mobilised. The violence had started on 9 June 2022 in Masia-Mbe village, in the Bateke Sud sector of Mai-Ndombe, where a Yaka farmer was injured while taxes were being collected on behalf of the traditional Teke chief. Yaka farmers began inciting others to refuse to pay taxes. Several sources reported that members of the Yaka community and other "non-native" farmers began organising meetings and inciting members of their community to claim that in the past, Kwamouth, in Mai-Ndombe province, used to belong to the Yaka. Economic interests, such as access to land and property, and political interests, such as the re-establishment of customary power, significantly influenced the continuation of the conflict. The increase in Mobondo's attacks against the FARDC in 2023 led the military authorities to label the conflict an "insurrection". The deadly attacks by the Teke and Yaka massively displaced the population, which worsened the serious humanitarian crisis. Since the beginning of the conflict, entire villages have been burned down and militias formed by members of both the Teke and Yaka communities have established checkpoints to search for members of other communities they consider hostile. Hundreds of schools and medical centres have been destroyed or forced to close. Serious human rights violations have been reported, including sexual violence, kidnappings for ransom and torture.

Hundreds of civilians have perished as a result of the conflict. According to ACLED, there were 346 fatalities in a total of 94 violent events (battles, violence against civilians and improvised explosive devices) in 2023, though the real figures are likely to be much higher, according to the UN Group of Experts,[46] since violence and crime were underreported and responsibility was difficult to assign due to the lack of access to conflict areas. The attacks of the Teke against what they considered "non-native" communities provoked violent reprisals by the Yaka, who began to organise the armed group Mobondo, which was joined by members of other allied communities, such as the Suku, Mbala, Ndinga, Songe and Ngongo. Throughout 2023, Mobondo increased its level of organisation, enhanced its military capabilities and carried out military-type attacks, according to the UN Group of Experts. However, it is still

unclear whether Mobondo is a hierarchically structured homogeneous group or a coalition of like-minded groups without a central command. In 2023, FARDC operations led to the disarmament and arrest of hundreds of Mobondo fighters. Although some were imprisoned and put on trial, many were transferred to FARDC training centres. In addition, Fabrice "Mini Kongo" Zombi, appointed by the president of the DRC as the chief negotiator between the Yaka and Teke communities, mobilised hundreds of Mobondo members to join FARDC training camps. "Mini Kongo" is a traditional Suku chief recognised as a ceremonial figure by the Yaka. As such, the Teke accused him of collaborating with Mobondo. According to the Group of Experts, more than 1,000 fighters from Mai-Ndombe and elsewhere, including Mobondo fighters who had surrendered, were recruited, trained and deployed to North Kivu, in the eastern DRC, to fight the M23 without these earlier events having been investigated.

South Sudan	
Start:	2009
Type:	Government, Resources, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government (SPLM/A), SPLM/A-in Opposition armed group (faction of former vice president, Riek Machar), Kitgwang dissident factions of the SPLA-IO led by Peter Gatdet, Simon Gatwech Dual and Johnson Olony (also known as "Agwalek"), SPLM-FD, SSLA, SSDM/A, SSDM-CF, SSNLM, REMNASA, NAS, SSUF (Paul Malong), communal militias (SSPPF, TFN, White Army, Shilluk Agwelek), Sudan Revolutionary Front armed coalition (SRF, composed of JEM, SLA-AW, SLA-MM and SPLM-N), Non-Signatory South Sudan Opposition Groups (NSSSOG), previously the South Sudan Opposition Movements Alliance (SSOMA, composed of NAS, SSUF/A, Real-SPLM, NDM-PF, UDRM/A, NDM-PF, SSNMC), Sudan, Uganda, UNMISS
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↓

Summary:
The peace agreement reached in 2005, which put an end to the Sudanese conflict, recognised the right to self-determination of the south through a referendum. However, the end of the war with the North and the later independence for South Sudan in 2011 did not manage to offer stability to the southern region. The disputes for the control of the territory, livestock and political power increased between the multiple communities that inhabit South Sudan, increasing the number, the gravity and the intensity of the confrontations between them. The situation became even worse after the general elections in April

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46. UN Security Council, *Letter dated 15 December 2023 from the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo addressed to the President of the Security Council*, S/2023/990, 30 December 2023.

2010, when several military officials who had presented their candidature or had supported political opponents to the incumbent party, the SPLM, did not win the elections. These military officers refused to recognise the results of the elections and decided to take up arms to vindicate their access to the institutions, condemn the Dinka dominance over the institutions and the under representation of other communities within them while branding the South Sudan government as corrupt. Juba's offerings of amnesty did not manage to put an end to insurgence groups, accused of receiving funding and logistical support from Sudan. In parallel, there was an escalation of violence in late 2013 between supporters of the government of Salva Kiir and those of former Vice President Riek Machar (SPLA-IO), unleashing a new round of violence that continues to this day. In 2015, a peace agreement was signed between the government and the SPLA-IO, which was ratified in 2018. However, the signatory parties' reluctance to implement it, as well as the emergence of other armed groups and community militias, have kept the war raging in the country.

The dynamics of instability and violence continued in the country during the year, owing primarily to intercommunity clashes, splits within the SPLA-IO and the contagious effect of the war in neighbouring Sudan. According to data provided by ACLED, in 2023 there were 464 violent events (battles, violence against civilians and improvised explosive devices) that costs the lives of 1,262 people. These data show a de-escalation of violence compared to the previous year, when 597 episodes of violence and 1,898 associated deaths were reported.[47] Despite this relative drop in fatalities, the problems linked to the humanitarian crisis and forced displacement in the country persisted. According to UNHCR data, 2.2 million people were refugees due to violence in mid-2023 and 1,490,100 were internally displaced.[48] These figures continue to rank South Sudan as having the fourth-most disregarded displacement crisis in the world, according to OCHA. OCHA also asserted that the forced displacement crisis has worsened because South Sudan has taken in more than half a million refugees from Sudan, in addition to all the South Sudanese refugees who have returned to the country due to the insecurity caused by the start of the armed conflict in Sudan in April 2023. Due to the persistent humanitarian crisis in the country, OCHA continued to predict that 9 million people (out of a population of 12.4 million) would require humanitarian assistance and protection in 2024, warning of high levels of violence, exploitation and abuse, including sexual and gender violence.[49]

Violence in the country was once again characterised by intercommunity clashes, as well as disputes between the SPLA-IO and different splinter factions. The intercommunity violence continued throughout

The dynamics of intercommunity violence in South Sudan continued, affecting multiple regions of the country

the year, affecting various states with clashes between members of different groups: Lou Nuer and Bor Dinka (Jonglei), Nuer and Twic Dinka (Abyei), Twic Dinka (Warrap) and Ngok Dinka (Abyei), Murle (Jonglei), Kuku and Bor Dinka (Central Equatoria), Luacjang and Pakam (Warrap) and Nuer and Shilluk (Malakal). Armed clashes also took place between ethnic Shilluk forces known as "Agwalek" under the command of General Johnson Olony against Nuer forces backed by General Simon Gatwech. These clashes had begun on 9 August 2022 after General Gatwech, the leader of the Kitgwang faction that split from the SPLA-IO that same year, dismissed General Olony as his second-in-command, motivating the formation of a new Kitgwang faction. Thus, the SPLA-IO continued to suffer from major internal divisions that weakened it. On 7 June, South Sudanese President Salva Kiir and Johnson Olony agreed to officially integrate "Agwalek" fighters into the South Sudanese Armed Forces. Later, in October, two other important men defected from the SPLA-IO to support the government faction led by Kiir: Simon Maguek Gai, the commander of Unity State, and Michael Wal Nyak, the commander of Jonglei State. Taken together, these defections drastically reduced the SPLA-IO's military capacity in both states. Tensions between Machar's forces and Gai's forces led to fighting in Unity State throughout the rest of the year, resulting in the SPLA-IO losing all its military positions except Panyijiar County, its last stronghold in Unity State.

Meanwhile, the outbreak of war in neighbouring Sudan between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) on 15 April had significant effects in South Sudan.[50] It threatened South Sudanese oil exports, which account for 85% of the South Sudanese government's revenue. In mid-June, the RSF threatened to blow up the pipeline connecting South Sudan to Sudan, which would prevent the export of South Sudanese oil through Port Sudan and have catastrophic economic consequences. The Sudanese conflict reduced food supplies along the border between the two countries, causing food shortages and high prices in northern South Sudan. In response to the Sudanese crisis, President Kiir led the efforts of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to mediate between the conflicting parties. On 15 March, the UN Security Council renewed the mandate of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) for one year, placing greater emphasis on protecting civilians, and on 26 May it extended sanctions on South Sudan, including the arms embargo.

Finally, some progress was reported during the year in the **implementation of the Revitalised Agreement**

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47. ACLED, Dashboard [Viewed on 26 February 2024].
48. UNHCR, Mid-Year Trends 2023, 25 October 2023.
49. OCHA, *South Sudan* [Viewed on 26 February 2024].
50. See the summary on Sudan in this chapter.

on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan of 2018 (R-ARCSS) and plans were confirmed to hold the presidential election in December 2024. The **peace talks in Rome** between the South Sudanese government and groups that had not signed the R-ARCSS, represented under the coalition of the Non-Signatory South Sudan Opposition Groups (NSSSOG), were formally reactivated in February after getting cancelled in late 2022. Nevertheless, no significant progress was made in the talks for the rest of the year, though Kenya did report its intention to host them in 2024.[51]

Sudan[52]	
Start:	2023
Type:	Government, Self-government, Resources, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government (Sudan Armed Forces), Rapid Support Forces (RSF), armed coalition Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF, composed of JEM, SLA-AW, SLA-MM and SPLM-N), several SLA factions, Eastern Sudan Liberation Forces, United Popular Front for Liberation and Justice, Beja National Congress, Beja Armed Congress, community militias, Wagner Group
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑

Síntesis:

After 30 years in power, Omar al-Bashir's regime fell in April 2019 after massive popular demonstrations that security forces used to carry out a coup d'état. After months of administration by the military junta and significant national tensions, a transitional civilian-military government was formed in late 2019. However, on 25 October 2021, a new military coup carried out by the military wing of the transitional government ended the political transition. It was followed by a period of widespread public protests against the military junta (Transitional Sovereignty Council) chaired by the head of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and deputy-chaired by the leader of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), Lieutenant General Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, popularly known as "Hemedti". In late 2022, after a year of negotiations, a framework agreement was reached in which the military promised to relinquish much of its political power and return it to civilian actors. However, disagreements between the SAF and RSF during the negotiations over security sector reform, especially regarding deadlines for integrating the RSF into the unified national Sudanese Armed Forces and the establishment of the security structure command, ended up unleashing a new armed conflict in the country on 15 April 2023. This new

outbreak of violence was initially concentrated in the capital, Khartoum, but over the months that followed it intensified and expanded over much of the country, affecting the dynamics of the pre-existing armed conflict in the regions of Darfur and the Two Areas South Kordofan and Blue Nile) and reaching eastern Sudan. In the Darfur region, the armed conflict dates back to 2003 and is rooted in demands made by various insurgent groups, primarily the SLA and JEM, for greater decentralisation and development of the region. The Sudanese government responded to the armed uprising in Darfur using the Sudanese Armed Forces and Arab Janjaweed militias. The reconfiguration of the state of Sudan following the secession of South Sudan in July 2011 aggravated tensions between the Sudanese government and both border regions (South Kordofan and Blue Nile), which had supported the southern SPLA insurgency during the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005). After the secession of South Sudan, the SPLA-North was formed in the Two Areas, beginning an armed conflict based on the insurgents' demand for recognition of ethnic and political plurality.

In April, a new armed conflict broke out in the country between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Tensions rose during the first quarter of the year between the country's military leaders, the chair of the Transitional Sovereignty Council (TSC) and head of the SAF, Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the deputy chair of the TSC and leader of the RSF, Lieutenant General Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, popularly known as "Hemedti", due to their disagreements during the negotiations over security sector reform, especially regarding deadlines for integrating the RSF into the unified national Sudanese Armed Forces and the establishment of the command structure.[53] Tensions rose in early April with the spread of rumours about the mobilisation of military personnel from both sides in Khartoum and Darfur. Finally, after several different actors failed in their attempts to mediate, the tensions led to armed clashes on 15 April between the SAF led by al-Burhan and the RSF commanded by Dagalo. Although initially the fighting was concentrated in the capital, Khartoum, killing hundreds of people in the first few days, it intensified over the course of the year and spread over almost the entire country, particularly in all five federal states of Darfur (North Darfur, Central Darfur, West Darfur, East Darfur and South Darfur), North and South Kordofan, Kassala, Gedarif, Red Sea and Blue Nile.[54] At first the SAF seized control of several cities, including Kassala and Port Sudan in the east, while the RSF had the advantage in Darfur and fighting intensified for control of Khartoum. During the year, the armed conflict was characterised by SAF attacks on cities with heavy

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51. See the summary on South Sudan in chapter 2 (Peace negotiations in Africa) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

52. In previous years, two distinct armed conflicts were identified in Sudan: Sudan (Darfur), which began in 2003, and Sudan (South Kordofan and Blue Nile), which started in 2012. Both conflicts, characterised as internationalised internal and motivated by self-government, resources and identity, were analysed jointly in this edition as part of the Sudanese armed conflict. This is because the dynamics of the armed conflict that began in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) affect a large part of the country and particularly the regions of Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile. Irregular armed actors from these regions are also actively involved in the conflict.

53. See the summary on Sudan in chapter 2 (Peace negotiations in Africa) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

54. Report of the Secretary-General, *Situation in the Sudan and the activities of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan*, S/2023/355, 16 May 2023

artillery and air strikes, while the RSF used guerrilla warfare techniques and surface-to-air missiles, as it lacked planes.

The beginning of the fighting gave rise to different mediation efforts that failed to contain the violence, despite the signing of different ceasefires (24 and 27-30 April; 4-11 and 22-31 May; 20 and 26-27 June, among others) and humanitarian truces, which were systematically violated by the parties. As the negotiations foundered, the fighting between the SAF and the RSF intensified and involved other armed groups, affecting regions that were already mired in dynamics of armed conflict, such as South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Darfur. Although several armed groups that had signed the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement declared their opposition to the war and their neutrality when the fighting first broke out between the SAF and RSF, including the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) Malik Agar faction and the Sudan Liberation Army Minni Minawi faction (SLA-MM), over time they took part in the hostilities.

The outbreak of fighting between the SAF and RSF plunged the Darfur region into the worst crisis since the end of the Second Sudanese Civil War. The year had already begun with fresh attacks against civilians and the proliferation of armed militias in Darfur, which caused the armed group Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) to announce the formation of a joint force with the RSF to put an end to the insecurity, excluding the Sudanese Armed Forces and other armed groups, but including the coalition of armed groups in West Darfur known as the Sudanese Alliance. These events also provoked the closure of the land border with the CAR, which remained shut until 9 March. In May, with fighting between the SAF and RSF intensifying in Darfur, tensions between communities worsened, especially between Rizeigat Arab groups (where most RSF personnel come from) and Masalit groups, which are not Arabs. This rise in violence prompted the governor of Darfur and leader of the SLA-MM, Minni Minnawi, to tell the inhabitants of Darfur to arm themselves on 28 May, increasing the risk of civil war. On 14 June, the governor of West Darfur was assassinated after he accused the RSF of genocide. During the following months, the RSF took control of large areas of Central, South, East and West Darfur, concentrating its offensive on South Darfur, which was captured in October after the conquest of its capital, Nyala, and on North Darfur. In November, after the RSF advanced towards El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur, different Darfuri armed groups that had signed the Juba

The armed conflict that began between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces on 15 April forcibly displaced over 7.5 million people and claimed over 13,000 lives after eight months of fighting

Peace Agreement, whose members largely come from the Zaghawa community, renounced their neutrality and joined the SAF. This could have important repercussions for Chad, whose government and military are dominated by members of the Zaghawa community. Furthermore, the faction that did not sign the Juba Peace Agreement, the Sudan Liberation Army Abdul Wahid al-Nur wing (SLA-AW), arrived in El Fasher on 24 November primarily to protect the displaced persons camps in the city.

The deteriorating security situation in **South Kordofan and Blue Nile** prompted the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) to mobilise on 8 June. Some reports accused the SPLM-N and RSF of attacking SAF positions in the al-Dalanj region. From then until the end of the year, the rebel group continued to expand its presence in the war in the states of South Kordofan and Blue Nile, emerging as the third force in the conflict.

In the **eastern part of the country**, in the states of Red Sea, Kassala and Gedarif, fighting was also reported throughout the year, giving rise to the emergence or rearmament of different regional armed groups, such as the Eastern Sudan Liberation Forces, led by Ibrahim Dunya, the United Popular Front for Liberation and Justice, headed by El Amin Daoud, the Beja National Congress, commanded by Mousa Mohamed Ahmed, and the Beja Armed Congress, led by Omar Taher.[55]

In late August, the head of the SAF, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, escaped from the general headquarters in Khartoum after the RSF had been besieging the city for months. Fighting continued in Khartoum and the neighbouring city of Omdurman for the rest of the year, while also intensifying in the east and other parts of the south of the country. Due to the security crisis, in early December the UN Security Council decided to end the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) and close down its operations, which it planned to end on 29 February 2024.

Finally, **in relation to the impact of the war, the data on the intensity and lethality of the conflict during the year collected by ACLED show more than 13,000 deaths in the country** due to violent episodes since the fighting first broke out in April. These were concentrated in the capital and the states of Darfur.[56] Furthermore, over 7.5 million people were forcibly displaced from their homes, of which 1.3 million were refugees and more than 6 million were internally displaced civilians, according to UNHCR data.[57] The UN warned that the number of people

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55. Radio Dabanga, "Eritrea military training camps raise concerns about security in eastern Sudan", *Radio Dabanga*, 26 January 2024.
56. ACLED, *Sudan: The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) Gains Ground in Sudan, Situation Update. December 2023, 12 January 2024* [Viewed on 15 January 2024].
57. ACNUR, "Sudan Situation", *Operational Data Portal* [Viewed on 15 January 2024].

needing humanitarian assistance in the country, which had already reached a record high before the clashes, equivalent to one third of the population, soared during the year to 25 million people, adding that the magnitude of the crisis could destabilise the entire region.

There were also many complaints of **human rights violations and war crimes** during the conflict. In West Darfur, the epicentre of the conflict between Rizeigat Arab and non-Arab Masalit communities, the UN reported in mid-July that the bodies of at least 87 Masalit people had been discovered in mass graves. The International Criminal Court reported the formal opening of an investigation into alleged **war crimes in Darfur**. Amnesty International also documented widespread war crimes committed by both sides in the conflict.[58] These events led to the adoption of Resolution A/HRC/RES/54/2 by the UN Human Rights Council on 11 October, which provided for an independent international fact-finding mission for Sudan, with a mandate to investigate and establish the facts, circumstances and root causes of all alleged human rights violations and abuses, as well as violations of international humanitarian law in the context of the armed conflict.

Horn of Africa

Ethiopia (Amhara)	
Start:	2023
Type:	Government, Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government of Ethiopia, regional government of Amhara, Amhara Fano militia
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑

Summary:

During the demonstrations between 2015 and 2018 that brought Abiy Ahmed, a member of the Oromo community, to power, there was a resurgence of nationalism among the Amhara, an ethnic group that has felt marginalised during this stage of the country's transformation and lives mostly in the Amhara region, though it can also be found in other parts of the country. The escalation of violence and repression in 2023 dates back to the peace agreement signed in 2022 by the federal government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) to end the war (2020-2022). The agreement raised concerns among the Amhara community, which had been excluded from the talks even though the nationalist Fano militias and the Amhara special forces (a paramilitary group linked to the regional government) fought on the side of the Ethiopian Army, as did Eritrea, which was also shut out of the agreement. All the actors involved committed crimes against humanity against the population of the Tigray community during the conflict in Tigray. Perceptions of betrayal spread throughout the Amhara region, especially after Abiy announced plans to dismantle the special forces in each of Ethiopia's 11 ethnic regions. The

prime minister proposed integrating the tens of thousands of special forces combatants into the Ethiopian Army and police to promote interethnic unity and prevent regional forces from being used as political tools and from getting drawn into conflicts, as was the case in Tigray. However, many Amhara regarded his plan with alarm, arguing that it would leave them vulnerable to attacks from neighbouring Tigray, their historical rivals in Ethiopia, as well as from the Oromo community, Ethiopia's largest ethnic group, followed by the Amhara. The Oromo armed group OLA has also been accused of committing widespread atrocities against Amhara people in Oromia, raising fears that it wants to drive them out of the region. Although some Amhara special force soldiers did agree to join the Ethiopian Army and police, many deserted and joined the Fano militias. Furthermore, this Amhara nationalist movement took advantage of the war in the Tigray region, using these paramilitary militias to regain and occupy two historically disputed territories that are part of Tigray (Western and Southern Tigray, called Welkait-Tsegede and Raya by Amhara nationalists, respectively), where a provisional Amhara administration was established that the federal government of Ethiopia banned after the conflict ended.

Instability in the Amhara region worsened starting on 6 April, when the federal government of Ethiopia announced the disarmament, dissolution and integration of the Amhara special forces and Fano militias into the Ethiopian Army and police. Since then, there has been an escalation of violence, repression and clashes between the federal security forces and these militias, which were joined by part of the regional security forces that deserted their posts. The announcement in April sparked widespread protests across the region for it was seen as threatening amid concerns that Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's alliance with Oromo nationalists and closer ties with Tigray following the peace deal in November 2022 was isolating the Amhara region. Some special forces refused to comply with the order and instead allied with the Fano militias, clashing with federal soldiers in several areas.[59] Demonstrations also broke out across the region, with protesters blocking roads, burning tyres and chanting slogans against Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and the ruling Prosperity Party and its regional branch. On 9 April, Abiy Ahmed vowed to press ahead with the plan as the government deployed troops, imposed a curfew and cut internet services in parts of Amhara. Dozens of people died in the unrest, which began to subside in mid-April.

However, on 27 April, unidentified gunmen killed Girma Yeshitila, the head of the Amhara branch of the Prosperity Party, and his bodyguard in the northern Shewa area. Addis Abeba responded with a harsh crackdown during which federal security forces were accused of committing serious forms of abuse that led to a gradual rise in violence and the beginning of a rebellion when other Amhara nationalist movements joined against the regional government and the federal government. This low-intensity conflict intensified

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58. Amnesty International, *Death Came To Our Home": War Crimes and Civilian Suffering In Sudan*, August 2023.
59. Reuters, "Amhara Gunfire Over Military Merger", *VOA Africa*, 10 April 2023.

in August, with the Fano militias taking control of several towns and repression by federal and regional forces. In early August, the federal government blocked Internet access in the region and declared a six-month state of emergency.[60] In the weeks that followed, the government launched an offensive to regain control of the occupied towns, expelling the Fano militias from the cities. There was also a wave of hundreds of arrests of suspects accused of having links to the militants, including politicians, such as the anti-government critic Christian Tadelle. The clashes and the death count worsened in September, as did reports of extrajudicial killings by both sides. Near the end of the year, federal security forces stepped up air operations with combat aircraft and drones against the Fano militias' bases. Many civilians were killed in these bombings. In August, ACLED reported that large parts of Amhara essentially experienced an institutional power vacuum, given the widespread rejection of the ruling party officials running the region, aligned with Abiy Ahmed. According to ACLED's data,[61] in 2023 there were 566 violent events (battles, violence against civilians and improvised explosive devices) in the Amhara region that claimed 1,718 lives. This figure combines violence directly linked to the armed conflict, crackdowns on protests against government action and the ethnic cleansing of civilians.

In September, the AU International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), which has a UN mandate, published a report detailing serious human rights violations committed in the different conflicts in Ethiopia. The report also covered how ongoing rights violations and abuse had become increasingly widespread in the country, particularly in the Oromia and Amhara regions, and noted that hostilities in Ethiopia had escalated to a "national scale". The ICHREE has not been granted access to Ethiopia since its initial visit in 2022. Following this report and given the denial of access, the UN Human Rights Council decided to suspend its mandate in October, meaning that there is no longer any independent mechanism investigating atrocities in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia (Oromia)	
Start:	2022
Type:	Self-Government, Identity, Resources Internal
Main parties:	Government of Ethiopia, regional government of Oromia, armed group Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), Amhara Fano militias
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=

Summary:
Ethiopia has been the scene of secessionist movements since the 1970s. Between 1973 and 1974, a political and

military movement called the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) arose in the central and southern Oromia region against the Mengistu dictatorship to establish an independent state for the Oromo community. Despite their differences, Oromo nationalist political and armed movements participated alongside other insurgent groups in the country to overthrow the Mengistu regime in 1991. However, in 1992 the OLF distanced itself from the EPRDF coalition government and launched a rebellion against this and other Oromo nationalist movements, demanding independence for the region. In the meantime, Oromia has experienced a cycle of protests initiated by the student movement in 2014 against the Ethiopian regime due to claims linked to its perceived marginalisation of the Oromo people. These protests provoked a harsh government crackdown that caused thousands of fatalities. The protests led in part to the resignation of Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn in 2018 and the appointment of Abiy Ahmed, a member of the Oromo community, who undertook a series of political reforms aimed at fostering national unity and reconciliation. Abiy Ahmed reached a peace agreement with the OLF and other political and military groups, facilitating their return from exile. Though Oromo nationalists assumed that the coming to power of Abiy Ahmed, a member of their community, would boost the region's autonomy, Abiy supports a more centralised state instead of promoting ethnic federalism. In addition, although the OLF became a political party, its military wing, the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), rejected the agreement and started a new rebellion, which led the government to designate it a terrorist group in May 2021. Since then, violence has been on the rise. There have also been recurring clashes between Somali herding communities and Oromo farming communities in the border areas between Oromia and Somali over competition for resources and the demarcation of the territories of both communities, with the climate emergency and the repressive intervention of the Liyu government police force exacerbating the situation.

The situation in the Ethiopian region of Oromia continued to be extremely serious in 2023, with persistent clashes and attacks by the armed group Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) and counterinsurgency actions by federal security forces. In 2023, the federal government of Ethiopia lost the support of the Amhara Fano militias, which turned against it and mostly retreated to the Amhara region, though some members remained in Oromia or came back to carry out attacks. All armed actors committed serious human rights violations against civilians. The Oromo armed group OLA has also been accused of committing widespread atrocities against the Amhara in the Oromia region, in revenge for acts of repression and violence committed by the Amhara Fano militias, though the OLA has denied that it is persecuting the Amhara community in the region. Fighting between the federal security forces and the OLA intensified in October 2022, coinciding with the negotiations that culminated in the peace agreement in November 2022 between the Ethiopian federal government and the political and military authorities of the Tigray region. After the agreement was signed and its implementation began, the federal authorities escalated attacks against the OLA. Pressure from the local authorities of the Oromia region, as well as the shared interest of the OLA

60. The Guardian, "Ethiopia declares a state of emergency in Amhara amid increasing violence", *The Guardian*, 4 August 2023.
61. ACLED, Dashboard [Viewed on 31 January 2024].

and the federal government to reach some type of truce, led to several indirect exploratory contacts in February 2023 between both parties, reflecting their interest in achieving a cessation of hostilities. In the midst of this climate of violence, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said he was committed to exploring dialogue with the OLA in March. Since the OLA had required third-party mediation, Kenyan-facilitated peace talks began in Zanzibar (Tanzania) on 25 April on behalf of the IGAD regional authority and Norway. Though this first round ended without progress in early May, both parties expressed their commitment to seeking a solution to the conflict. Since then, violence persisted with serious consequences for the civilian population. However, a second negotiating round that began in late October in Tanzania, mediated by the IGAD, was made public in November.[62] Hostilities resumed after the negotiations fell apart in November, increasing attacks with drone airstrikes and raising tensions between Amhara armed militias that did not retreat to the Amhara region, local Amhara militias in the Oromia region and Amhara militias launching attacks on Oromia from the Amhara region on the one side and Oromo groups on the other side, as well as their respective civilian populations, provoking an increase in attacks against civilians. These attacks could be described as ethnic cleansing carried out by the Amhara Fano militias and by the OLA in places like the North Shewa zone, in the Oromia region, home to a significant Amhara community. In this sense, Fano militia groups penetrated the Oromia region, especially the zones of West Shewa and North Shewa, with the aim of attacking the Oromo civilian population.

According to data gathered by ACLED,[63] in 2023 there were 572 violent events (battles, violence against civilians and improvised explosive devices) in the Oromia region, which claimed 1,642 lives, fewer than in 2022, when there were 707 violent events in which 4,533 people died.[64]

Meanwhile, the AU International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, which had a UN mandate, published a report in September warning that Eritrean troops and the Fano militias continued to commit serious atrocities in Tigray. Specifically, the report stated that despite the ceasefire between the government and the TPLF, Eritrean troops and the Amhara militia remained in the Tigray region and continued to commit atrocities against civilians, including rape and sexual violence against women and girls. Since its initial visit in 2022, the Commission has not been granted access to Ethiopia. Following this report and the denial of access to the Commission, the UN Human Rights Council suspended the Commission's mandate in October, meaning that there is no longer any independent mechanism investigating atrocities in Ethiopia.

Somalia	
Start:	1988
Type:	Government, System Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Federal government, regional pro-government forces, Somaliland, Puntland, clan militias and warlords, Ahlu Sunna Waljama'a, USA, France, Ethiopia, Türkiye, ATMIS, EUNAVFOR Somalia (Operation Atalanta), Combined Task Force 151, al-Shabaab, ISIS
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑

Summary:
The armed conflict and the absence of effective central authority in the country have their origins in 1988, when a coalition of opposing groups rebelled against the dictatorial power of Siad Barre and three years later managed to overthrow him. This situation led to a new fight within this coalition to occupy the power vacuum, which had led to the destruction of the country and the death of more than 300,000 people since 1991, despite the failed international intervention at the beginning of the 1990s. The diverse peace processes to try and establish a central authority came across numerous difficulties, including the affronts between the different clans and sub clans of which the Somalia and social structure was made up, the interference of Ethiopia and Eritrea and the power of the various warlords. The last peace initiative was in 2004 by the GFT, which found support in Ethiopia to try to recover control of the country, partially in the hands of the ICU (Islamic Courts Union) The moderate faction of the ICU has joined the GFT and together they confront the militias of the radical faction of the ICU which control part of the southern area of the country. In 2012 the transition that began in 2004 was completed and a new Parliament was formed which elected its first president since 1967. The AU mission, AMISOM (which included the Ethiopian and Kenyan troops present in the country) and government troops are combating al-Shabaab, a group that has suffered internal divisions.

The armed conflict in Somalia continued to intensify compared to previous years. The African mission in the country (ATMIS) stepped up its operations in 2023,[65] as did the Somali National Army and its local and international allies. The armed group al-Shabaab also increased its attacks. In recent years, Somalia has intensified its attacks against al-Shabaab with the support of clans, local militias and regional and international allies to fulfil the promises made

62. Africanews, "Second round of talks between Ethiopian government and Oromo rebels", *Africanews*, 9 November 2023.
63. ACLED, Dashboard [Viewed on 31 January 2024].
64. These figures should be taken with caution since they combine violence directly linked to the armed conflict, in addition to acts of repression of social mobilizations against government actions and acts of ethnic cleansing against the civilian population. This figure also includes acts of violence against the minority of the Amhara community present in the Oromiya region perpetrated by elements of the Oromiya regional government and the OLA, as well as clashes between community militias from Somali livestock communities and Oromo agricultural communities that claim hundreds of fatalities every year. Therefore, there are real problems in determining the true number of fatalities linked to this armed conflict.
65. The AU mission in the country, AMISOM, was transformed into the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) in April 2022.

by President Hassan Sheikh Mohammud to focus his attention on the war against al-Shabaab to stabilise the country since he came to power in May 2022.[66] Despite these attempts to stop al-Shabaab, it could still carry out complex and asymmetric attacks in Somalia, as noted by the UN Panel of Experts in October. However, this international panel noted "encouraging" signs that the offensive had undermined al-Shabaab's ability to govern and influence the newly liberated territory. Nevertheless, the panel added, the government will face the double pressure of coordinating the next phase of the offensive while managing several "containment" operations in the central states of Hirshabelle and Galmudug.[67] The Islamic State (ISIS) faction in Somalia remained operational and carried out attacks, but they were largely limited to the region of Bari, in northeastern Puntland. The group suffered a setback in January 2023 with the death of Bilal al-Sudani, the head of fundraising for Al-Karrar (ISIS) in Somalia. Meanwhile, the armed conflict between ISIS and al-Shabaab dragged on. Given the relative progress made in fighting the armed groups, the AU accepted the Somali federal government's request to extend ATMIS phase 2 for three months in October. This transferred the decision to the UN Security Council, which agreed in November. The decision put off the withdrawal of 3,000 troops until 31 December 2023 after phase 1 had been completed, sending 2,000 troops home in June 2023 and reducing the military and police component of the ATMIS to 17,626 troops (including 1,040 police officers). The objective remained to complete the transition and fully withdraw ATMIS in December 2024.

The Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS)[68] indicated that deaths related to the conflict in Somalia increased by 22% in 2023, reaching a record of 7,643 fatalities. Virtually all this violence is attributed to incidents involving al-Shabaab. This figure triples the deaths since 2020, according to ACSS calculations. Most violent events (65%) and deaths (77%) were battle-related, reflecting the continuing government-led offensive against al-Shabaab. In Kenya, the number of deaths doubled over the previous year and reached 279

The Somali federal government's offensive against al-Shabaab enjoyed local, regional and international support but it did not reduce the group's ability to counterattack or to carry out more frequent or complex attacks

The conflict in Somalia was compounded with the worst drought in decades in 2023, followed by the most severe floods in generations, according to OCHA

as a result of violence linked to al-Shabaab in 2023, mainly on Kenyan soil along the border with Somalia, although 96% of the war-related deaths occurred in Somalia. **According to ACLED, in 2023 the number of fatalities rose to 7,912 in Somalia and 2,536 violent events were reported,**[69] in keeping with the upward trend in 2022 (with 6,418 deaths), 2021 (3,286) and 2020 (3,236). Combined with the worst drought in decades in 2023 and followed by the most severe floods in generations (within a few months of each other), the conflict has caused 4.3 million people (21% of the population) to face higher and critical levels of food insecurity (phase 3+ of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification or IPC, according to the FAO).[70] OCHA warned that 40% of all five-year-old children suffer from acute malnutrition, 3.8 million people have been displaced (80% of which are women and children) and cholera has broken out in different parts of the country. The country also continued to suffer from devastating gender violence, as explained by the executive director of UN Women, Sima Bahous, at the UN Security Council meeting held in February. Rates of sexual violence have risen alarmingly since 2020. They doubled in 2022 compared to 2019 and continue to climb. This situation was compounded by the consequences of climate change, with the worst drought in many decades, which had a devastating impact on all Somalis, with women and girls suffering disproportionately. Armed groups, especially al-Shabaab, continued to abduct women and girls, forcing families to give their daughters to marry fighters, occupying hospitals and maternity wards and silencing and threatening local people who denounced these activities, making impunity widespread. Somalia continued to be one of the worst countries in the world for journalists, according to the National Union of Somali Journalists,[71] since they were threatened by the government, al-Shabaab and some militias and clans. This situation did not improve after the change of government in 2022. The country continued to be ranked the most dangerous for journalists in Africa for the ninth year in a row, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists' Global Impunity Index, and the second most dangerous in the world, after Syria,[72] though the serious escalation

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66. ACLED, *Somalia: Conflict Expands to Galmudug State*, 24 March 2023.
67. UN Security Council, *Letter dated 25 August 2023 from the Panel of Experts on Somalia addressed to the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolution 751 (1992) concerning Al-Shabaab*, S/2023/724, 2 October 2023.
68. Africa Center for Strategic Studies, *Deaths Linked to Militant Islamist Violence in Africa Continue to Spiral*, 29 January 2024.
69. This figure takes into account violent events (battles, violence against civilians and improvised explosive devices) in Somalia as a whole, excluding the five regions that make up Somaliland (Awdal, Woqooyi Galbeed, Togdheer, Sool and Sanaag). If considering Somalia as a whole, this figure would increase to 2,662 violent events and 8,341 fatalities in 2023. ACLED, Dashboard [Viewed on 31 January 2024].
70. OCHA, Somalia, Dashboard [Viewed on 31 January 2024].
71. Somali Journalists Syndicate, *SJS Annual Report 2022: State of Press Freedom in Somalia*, 31 January 2023.
72. Somalia has ranked first in the world for the past eight years. This drop to second place does not indicate any improvement in its record of impunity, but rather is caused by the method used to calculate the rankings. See CPJ, Global Impunity Index 2023, 31 October 2023.

of violence in Gaza starting on 7 October relegated them to the second and third position.

The UN Panel of Experts confirmed al-Shabaab's ability to take advantage of geographic discontinuity in Somali National Army positions, assimilate into local communities during tactical withdrawals and conduct counterattacks against pro-government militias and forward operating bases. These capabilities indicated that al-Shabaab remained resilient, adaptable and lethal. Even though al-Shabaab was expelled from large parts of central Somalia, several of its middle and senior leaders were killed during the year and at least two of its commanders surrendered, it was able to replace the slain leaders by others who had already been trained, increased the tempo of its operations and carried out complex attacks. In May 2023, it carried out the most serious attack of the year against the Ugandan ATMIS forward operating base in Buulo Mareer (Lower Shabelle region, South West State). Whereas al-Shabaab claimed that the attack killed 137 soldiers, Ugandan military sources said it killed around 100. According to the UN Panel of Experts, al-Shabaab continued to use suicide attacks (11) and car bombs (29)[73] as its main weapons against the security forces and state infrastructure, as well as increasingly sophisticated attacks with improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Furthermore, the offensive against al-Shabaab inside Somalia and along its border lacked effective national and international cooperation. The government offensive initially weakened the group, but it faced delays in mobilising troops from the ATMIS countries on the front line (Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya, as part of Operation Black Lion, agreed at the beginning of the year and reaffirmed in August). Given the reduction of the ATMIS mission, new problems are likely to arise.

Various analysts discussed problems of governability and cooperation between the federal government and the federated member states, where the difficulties in guaranteeing security and public services are combined with the member states' desire to prolong their mandate. In this context, different actors exploited this weak governance in favour of their own interests, with corruption proliferating, such as the embezzlement of public income from fishing by intermediaries. **The announcement on 1 January 2024 that Ethiopia**

The agreement between Ethiopia and Somaliland triggered a serious diplomatic crisis between both and Somalia that could affect Ethiopia's involvement in the AU mission (ATMIS) and the offensive against al-Shabaab

and Somaliland had signed a memorandum of understanding[74] triggered a serious diplomatic crisis between them and Somalia that took on regional dimensions due to the politics of Ethiopia and Somalia's regional alliances. This agreement would give landlocked Ethiopia the opportunity to acquire a naval base and commercial maritime service in the Gulf of Aden through a leasing agreement, according to the Ethiopian and Somaliland administrations. In exchange, according to Somaliland's President Muse Bihi Abdi, Ethiopia would internationally recognise the region as an independent country. Addis Abeba clarified that it still had to evaluate that request.[75] Ethiopia has historically sought to diversify its access to the sea, since 95% of its trade is carried out through Djibouti, and in recent months Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed had indicated that the issue was existential for Ethiopia. This provoked reactions from neighbouring Eritrea and relations between the two countries deteriorated.

Somalia declared the agreement void and even threatened Ethiopia with starting a war if necessary to preserve its national sovereignty, as Somalia still considers Somaliland a part of Somalia, despite its de facto independence since 1991, which lacks international recognition. According to various analysts,[76] though a confrontation between both countries is unlikely, the agreement could seriously damage relations between both countries and have consequences in the war against al-Shabaab, since Somalia's disapproval of Ethiopia could put pressure on Ethiopian involvement in Somalia and end in Ethiopia's withdrawal from the AU mission (ATMIS), to which it is one of the main troop contributors.[77] In November, the UN Security Council extended the mandate of ATMIS until 30 June 2024.

Somalia (Somaliland – SSC-Khatumo)	
Start:	2023
Type:	Self-government, Identity, Territory Internal
Main parties:	Republic of Somaliland, SSC-Khatumo administration (Khatumo State), Puntland State, al-Shabaab
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↑

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73. Figures related to the period covered by the report of the UN Panel of Experts, between 16 December 2022 and 15 August 2023.
74. Ali, Faisal, "Ethiopia and Somaliland reach agreement over access to ports", *The Guardian*, 1 January 2024.
75. The agreement revolves around the port of Berbera, which was recently expanded by the UAE-based port logistics company DP World. For further information, see the summary on Somalia-Somaliland in chapter 2 (Peace negotiations in Africa), in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.
76. Weldemariam, Alemayehu, "Ethiopia's deal with Somaliland upends regional dynamics, risking strife across the Horn of Africa", *The Conversation*, 13 January 2024.
77. See the summary on Somalia-Somaliland in chapter 2, (Peace negotiations in Africa) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

Summary:

In early 2023, fighting intensified between the security forces of Somaliland and militias from the regions of Sool, Sannag and Cayn, which form part of Somaliland and call themselves SSC-Khatumo. Somaliland and Puntland are involved in a historical dispute over control of these border regions that dates back to 1998, when Puntland was established as an autonomous republic. The dispute has devolved into an armed conflict between the militias of these regions and Somaliland. The three regions of Sool, Sannag and Cayn are geographically located within the borders of Somaliland, though most clans in Sool, Sannag and Cayn (called SSC, by their initials) are associated with those of Puntland, so the SSC militias are allies of Puntland. Since the 1990s, there have been sporadic clashes and attempts at mediation between Puntland and Somaliland and between Somaliland and the SSC militias. In 2012, Khatumo State was created, including part of the regions of Sool, Sanaag and Cayn, calling itself SSC-Khatumo, which added more complexity to the situation. SSC-Khatumo is located within Somaliland, which claims to be independent, yet is opposed by these regions, which have gradually expressed their desire to become a new state of Somalia. In 2016, the SSC-Khatumo administration and Somaliland began peace talks. However, tensions simmered and sporadic clashes continued intermittently between the security forces of Somaliland and the SSC-Khatumo militias until 2023, when the situation escalated, leaving hundreds of people dead.

Fighting between the security forces of Somaliland and local militias mainly from the Dhulbahante clan intensified in early 2023, leading to what appeared to be a new armed conflict. The epicentre of the violence was Las Anod, the capital of the disputed Sool region, where fighting raged throughout the year. The violence broke out in late December 2022, when fighting began between protesters and security forces in Las Anod that claimed at least 20 civilians' lives. Protesters complained about a lack of security in the city, which had been suffering regular killings in recent years, including the 26 December assassination of local leader Abdifatah Abdullahi Abdi (otherwise known as "Hadrawi"), a member of the opposition Waddani Party. The use of heavy artillery and the recruitment of new fighters by Somaliland's security forces and SSC-Khatumo militias increased the risk of escalation in the fighting between the clan families and of the conflict's expansion beyond the Sool region. Some of Somaliland's political leaders resigned to reject the president of Somaliland's militaristic approach to the dispute. **According to ACLED, there were 367 fatalities in a total of 91 violent events in 2023 (battles, violence against civilians and improvised explosive devices).[78]**

There are conflicting accounts about the origins and reasons for the conflict. Somaliland pointed to various actors and armed groups in the Las Anod conflict, including Puntland, al-Shabaab and other groups opposed to peace. In talks with the UN Panel of Experts,[79] officials from Somaliland said that al-Shabaab was taking advantage of the conflict to expand its influence towards northern Somalia and was trying to build a corridor between the Galgala mountains (Puntland) and Jijiga (Ethiopia) passing through Las Anod and Buuhoodle, which would give it new avenues from which to carry out external attacks in Djibouti and Ethiopia and expand its access to the Gulf of Aden. Somaliland is considered a bulwark against al-Shabaab's regional expansion. While the UN Panel of Experts did receive information from Somaliland about al-Shabaab's possible involvement in the December 2022 assassination of the activist and politician that sparked the current conflict, it has not yet seen any credible evidence of al-Shabaab's alleged expansion in the north. Overall, Somaliland maintained that it had only acted in self-defence and had refrained from attacking clan militias in Las Anod, while repeating its commitment to seek a peaceful solution and support future international and regional efforts to end the fighting. On 9 February 2023, al-Shabaab released a statement through its media foundation Al-Kata'ib denying any involvement in the Las Anod conflict caused by the government of Somaliland.

On the other side of the conflict is the Dhulbahante clan, whose elders returned to Las Anod in January 2023. A month later, they issued a statement rejecting Somaliland's demand for independence[80] and announcing their intention to become part of Somalia. On 6 July, the Dhulbahante elders appointed a 45-member committee to create the executive body of the state of SSC-Khatumo (new administration proclaimed by the Dhulbahante clan community), which elected Abdiqadir Ahmed Aw-Ali (popularly known as "Firdhiye") as president on 5 August 2023. In October, Somaliland's President Muse Bihi said that Somaliland would not accept a separate administration in Sool, referring to SSC-Khatumo. Meanwhile, the president of SSC-Khatumo visited the Somali capital of Mogadishu from 6 to 22 October and repeated his desire to form a new Somali member state during talks with Somali Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre and President Mohamud. Local media reported on 19 October that Mogadishu had recognised SSC-Khatumo as an interim administration. In line with this decision, and to express its autonomy from Puntland, on 23 December SSC-Khatumo rejected participation in the Puntland elections scheduled for January 2024 and insisted on becoming an autonomous state of Somalia.

Fighting in July affected the Las Anod hospital, wounding aid workers and medical staff and prompting the NGO MsF to withdraw from the hospital. Combat involving heavy artillery and mortar fire intensified on

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78. ACLED, Dashboard [Viewed on 31 January 2024].
79. UN Security Council, *Letter dated 25 August 2023 from the Panel of Experts on Somalia addressed to the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolution 751 (1992) concerning Al-Shabaab*, S/2023/724, 2 October 2023.
80. See the summary on Somalia in this chapter and the summary on Somalia-Somaliland in chapter 2 (Peace negotiations in Africa) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

25 August, leading to the withdrawal of Somaliland's forces and the loss of more territory to the Dhulbahante clan militia. After the first clashes, some regional and international mediation initiatives were proposed, even by neighbouring Ethiopia, as highlighted by the UN Panel of Experts. However, all these initiatives failed.[81] In early April, Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud appointed Abdikarim Hussein Guled as the federal government's envoy for Somaliland affairs. In June, the UN Security Council called for Somaliland's security forces to immediately withdraw from Las Anod, calling on the parties to exercise restraint and refrain from provocative actions and incitement to violence. Somaliland countered that the Security Council did not recognise al-Shabaab's involvement in the conflict and all the implications that had for peace and security in the region. Puntland's President Said Abdullahi Deni promised that his government would openly support the people of Khatumo State if the Somaliland government ignored the Security Council's calls to withdraw and restore peace. A delegation of clan elders who had travelled to Las Anod and Hargeysa with the support of the federal government to discuss a ceasefire in May returned to Mogadishu on 15 July for further consultations. On 27 August, the UN, AU, IGAD, EU and others condemned the escalation of the conflict in the area around Las Anod and called for an immediate ceasefire, an end to the mobilisation and respect for human rights and international humanitarian law by all parties involved. The UN remained committed to promote dialogue and a cessation of hostilities. By the end of the year, fighting between Somaliland's security forces and Dhulbahante clan militias subsided.

Maghreb - North Africa

Libya	
Start:	2011
Type:	Government, Resources, System Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Unity Government with headquarters in Tripoli, National Stability Government (NSG) with headquarters in Tobruk, armed groups including the Libyan National Army (LNA, also called Arab Libyan Armed Forces, ALAF), ISIS, AQIM, mercenaries and Wagner Group, Türkiye
Intensity:	1
Trend:	=

Summary:
In the context of the uprisings in North Africa, popular protests against the government of Muammar Gaddafi began in February 2011. In power since 1969, his regime was characterized by an authoritarian stance repression of dissent, corruption and serious shortcomings at the institutional level. Internal conflict degenerated into an escalation of violence leading to a civil war and an international military intervention by NATO forces. After months of fighting and the capture and execution of Gaddafi in late October, the rebels announced the liberation of Libya. However, the country remains affected by high levels of violence derived from multiple factors, including the inability of the new authorities to control the country and ensure a secure environment; the high presence of militias unwilling to surrender their weapons; and disputes over resources and trafficking routes. The situation in the country deteriorated from mid-2014 onward, with higher levels of violence and persistent political fragmentation. Efforts to solve the situation have been hampered by this scene of fragmentation and a climate of instability has assisted the expansion of ISIS in the North African country. The dynamics of violence have been accentuated by the involvement of foreign actors in support of the various opposing sides, motivated by geopolitical and economic interests, given Libya's strategic location in the Mediterranean basin and its great oil wealth.

The trend of the decrease in deaths associated with the armed conflict observed since the ceasefire agreement of October 2020 continued throughout 2023, but in a context of political impasse, power struggles between the rival governments controlling the country and failure to resolve underlying problems that affected its prospects for political and economic stability and security. According to data collected by ACLED, 89 people died in acts of violence linked to the conflict in 2023 (battles, explosions or remote violence and violence against civilians). This is a body count similar to those of recent years (157 in 2022 and 115 in 2021) and significantly lower than those reported in the years immediately preceding the ceasefire (around 1,500 in 2020 and 2,000 in 2019). Throughout the year, the general security situation in the country remained fragile and clashes occurred in Tripoli, Benghazi and Gharyan (west), which illustrated the fragmentation of security actors, the problems stemming from the lack of a central command and the struggles to control territories and resources. Thus, the most serious armed clashes of 2023 occurred in August, when two days of fighting between the Deterrence Agency for Combating Organised Crime and Terrorism and the 444 Combat Brigade in a densely populated area of Tripoli caused the death of 55 people. Another serious episode occurred in October, when Khalifa Haftar's armed group LNA tried to arrest the former Minister of Defence of the Government of National Accord (GNA), provoking armed clashes with militias allied with the former cabinet member. The incident ended with an unknown number of deaths and people missing. There were also clashes over the control of illegal activities, hostilities between various LNA units in Benghazi and fighting between the LNA and criminal groups during the year. Warnings were issued about the potential destabilising effects that the conflict in Sudan could have on Libya and about

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81. UN Security Council, *Letter dated 25 August 2023 from the Panel of Experts on Somalia addressed to the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolution 751 (1992) concerning Al-Shabaab*, S/2023/724, 2 October 2023.

the possible impacts of the crisis in Chad in southern Libya in 2023. The Chadian Army and armed opposition groups from Chad engaged in clashes in the border area. In August, the LNA carried out air strikes on the border and against Chadian opposition positions.

The fragility of the situation on the North African country was also exposed in 2023 due to the disastrous consequences of Storm Daniel, which led to the destruction of two dams and the death and disappearance of thousands of people in Derna (east) in September. The counts were not precise, but the WHO estimated 4,000 deaths, around 8,500 people who disappeared and 43,000 people who were forcibly displaced. The unprecedented torrential rains (50 times more likely today than in the past due to climate change, according to experts) had devastating effects that are also explained by the long-term consequences of violence, institutional division and governance problems. Libyan groups demanded an independent investigation into responsibilities for maintaining structures and failures to evacuate at-risk communities. Later, the UN also warned Libyan authorities about parallel efforts to respond to the disaster and disputes over the control of reconstruction funds. The migrant and refugee population continued to be particularly vulnerable in Libya, also (but not only) because of Storm Daniel, which claimed 500 lives and made another 500 people disappear. The North African country continued to be a route for those trying to cross the Mediterranean towards Europe, albeit an extremely dangerous one, as 939 people who followed it died and 1,248 others went missing between January and November 2023. Another 15,000 people, including minors, were intercepted and returned to Libya in 2023. Human rights groups also continued to denounce militias and the Libyan authorities for human rights violations, including the persecution and harassment of civil society organisations.

Negotiations involving different local and international actors continued during 2023, but no definitive political agreement to hold elections was achieved. The elections had originally been planned for December 2021.[82] Thus, the impasse persisted that had led to the formation of two rival governments in early 2022, one based in Tripoli (the Government of National Unity (GNU), recognised by the UN) and another established in eastern Libya (the Government of National Stability (GNS), aligned with the House of Representatives in Tobruk and with General Khalifa Haftar's armed group LNA or ALAF). Efforts focused on defining a road map for the elections in 2023. However, controversies continued around the rules that should govern voting, including the configuration of a new interim government. In this context, at the end of the year the UN special envoy for Libya tried to promote dialogue between the country's main institutional actors. Meanwhile, the 5+5 Joint Military Commission continued to monitor the implementation and provisions of the ceasefire agreement, such as the withdrawal of foreign forces and mercenaries from the country. However, in practice this withdrawal was compromised by the political impasse and the deterioration of the situation in the Sahel and Sudan, among other dynamics.

Southern Africa

Mozambique (north)	
Start:	2017
Type:	System, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) or Islamic State Mozambique Province (ISMP)- formerly Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jama (ASWJ)-, al-Qaeda, South African private security company DAG (Dyck Advisory Group), Tanzania, Rwanda, South Africa, Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), "Naparama" local militias
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓

Summary:
Since late 2017, the province of Cabo Delgado in northern Mozambique has suffered an armed conflict led by Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jamo (ASWJ). The armed jihadist organisation made its first appearance in October 2017 when it attacked three police posts in the Mocímboa da Praia district in Cabo Delgado province. Since that time, Cabo Delgado has been the epicentre of rising violent activity in the country. While some reports claim that ASWJ fighters have received training in Tanzania and Somalia, which has led locals to call them al-Shabaab, alluding to the Somali jihadist group, no significant links to international jihadist networks have been established. The causes of the outbreak of violence refer rather to factors linked to the grievances and marginalisation of the Muslim minority in Mozambique (22% of the population), as well as to the extreme poverty of what is the most underdeveloped province in the country. Poverty rates in Cabo Delgado contrast with its enormous economic potential due to its significant natural gas reserves, which have generated significant investment in the area, but this has not helped to reduce inequality and poverty among its population. Since the end of 2017, the Mozambican security forces have developed a security policy that has increased repression and retaliation in the area, influencing new factors that trigger violence. In 2018, the group intensified its use of violence against civilians and expanded the scope of its operations, leading to the deployment of international forces from Rwanda and the SADC Standby Force Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) in the country to help the government to combat the insurgency in mid-2021.

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82. See the summary on Libya in chapter 2 (Peace negotiations in Africa) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

Violence in the province of Cabo Delgado fell significantly during the year, with 71% fewer armed incidents compared to the previous year and an 80% drop in violent attacks against civilians. According to ACLED data, a total of 170 violent events were reported during the year (battles, violence against civilians and attacks with improvised explosive devices) that caused 271 deaths in Cabo Delgado. This is a huge decline compared to 2022, when 905 deaths were reported, and to 2021, when 1,067 people were killed in the province.[83] The Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) reported an 80% decrease in violence against civilians, with 61 deaths reported, compared to the 437 reported in 2022, when violence had increased by 57% over 2021.[84] The waning violence was due to the combined effects of the intervention of the Southern African Development Community's Standby Force Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) and of Rwandan forces that were deployed in July 2021 to help the Mozambican government to battle the jihadist insurgency, Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) or "Wilayah Wasat Ifriqiya". The joint intervention of national and international forces helped the government to regain control of 90% of the land that had fallen into the hands of the insurgency. Among other things, this allowed the authorities to reopen the Tanzanian border on 11 September through the Namoto border crossing between Cabo Delgado and the Tanzanian province of Mtwara after remaining closed for two years due to insecurity. At the end of the year, the main focus of instability in the province remained the rural areas in the northeastern part of Macomia district. Since the violence started in the region in late 2017, it is estimated that the conflict has claimed around 5,000 lives. By the end of 2023, 850,000 people had been internally displaced in the four northern provinces of Cabo Delgado, Niassa, Nampula and Zambezia.

The most significant events of the year included the launch of a new counterinsurgency operation by the Mozambican government and the SAMIM in Cabo Delgado on 1 January. Dubbed "Operation Vulcão IV", it was aimed at controlling the Messalo River basin in Muidumbe district and the nearby forests to the north and west in Macomia district. In February, the ISCAP insurgents launched an outreach campaign to ask communities for support. This change in strategy was interpreted as an attempt to get the population's help and to secure supply lines to compensate for the territory lost since the deployment of SAMIM and Rwandan troops. In April, the government of Mozambique issued a decree granting legal authority to and regulating the operation of community militias known as "Naparama" that emerged to combat the insurgency in Cabo Delgado in 2022. This decree finalised the process to legalise

Violence in the province of Cabo Delgado in Mozambique fell by nearly 70% in 2023 over the previous year

these militias, which had begun when Parliament passed a law in late 2022 that recognised them as a force linked to the government. After relative calm between March and April due to the rainy season and Ramadan, there was an intensification of ISCAP violence, mainly in the coastal districts, which caused the Mozambican Army and international forces to step up their activity along the Macomia coast. In this context, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) renewed the SAMIM's mandate for one more year on 11 July. Later, in August, the Mozambican Army announced the death of three senior ISCAP commanders, including Ibn Omar, the organisation's alleged leader in Mozambique, in an operation carried out in the forests of Macomia. By the end of the year, the insurgents had advanced towards the southern districts of Meluco and Quissanga in Cabo Delgado, prompting the Mozambican Army to fortify its positions against a possible attack on the provincial capital, Pemba. In late November, the president of the Islamic Council of Mozambique announced the creation of an international commission to promote peace talks between the government and the insurgents in Cabo Delgado.

West Africa

Cameroon (Ambazonia/North West and South West)	
Start:	2018
Type:	Self-government, Identity Internalised internal
Main parties:	Government of Cameroon, Government of Nigeria, a political-military secessionist movement including the opposition Ambazonia Coalition Team (ACT, including IG Sako, to which belong the armed groups Lebialem Red Dragons and SOCADEF) and the Ambazonia Governing Council (AGovC, including IG Sisiku, whose armed wing is the Ambazonia Defence Forces, ADF), various different militias and smaller armed groups
Intensity:	2
Trend:	=

Summary:
After Germany's defeat in the First World War, Cameroon came under the mandate of the League of Nations and was divided between French Cameroon and British Cameroon. In 1961, the two territories that made up British Cameroon held a referendum limiting their self-determination to union with the already independent Republic of Cameroon (formerly French Cameroon) or union with Nigeria. The southern part of British Cameroon (a region currently corresponding to the provinces of North West and South West) decided to join the Republic of Cameroon, whereas

83. ACLED, Dashboard [Viewed on 12 February 2024].
84. Africa Center for Strategic Studies, *Deaths Linked to Militant Islamist Violence in Africa Continue to Spiral*, 29 January 2024.

the north preferred to join Nigeria. A poorly conducted re-unification in the 1960s based on centralisation and assimilation has led the English-speaking minority of what was once southern British Cameroon (20% of the country's population) to feel politically and economically marginalised by state institutions, which are controlled by the French-speaking majority. Their frustrations rose in late 2016, when a series of sector-specific grievances were transformed into political demands, which caused strikes, riots and a growing escalation of tension and government repression. This climate has led a majority of the population in the region demanding a new federal political status without ruling out secession and has prompted the resurgence of identity movements dating back to the 1970s. These movements demand a return to the federal model that existed between 1961 and 1972. Trust between English-speaking activists and the government was shaken by the arrest of the main figures of the federalist movement in January 2017, which has given a boost to groups supporting armed struggle as the only way to achieve independence. Since then, both English-speaking regions have experienced general strikes, school boycotts and sporadic violence. Insurgent activity has escalated since the secessionist movement's declaration of independence on 1 October and the subsequent government repression to quell it.

The armed conflict between Cameroonian state security forces and the separatist political and military movements in the two English-speaking provinces in the southwestern part of the country continued to rage throughout the year. According to data from the International Crisis Group and ACLED, the conflict has caused the deaths of around 6,000 people since 2018. According to ACLED, there were 429 fatalities in a total of 262 violent events in 2023 (battles, violence against civilians and improvised explosive attacks), slightly fewer than in 2022, when there were 525 deaths in 343 violent episodes. The security forces were unable to stop the armed groups' attacks despite the defections of some insurgent leaders, such as David Dibo and Ekpe Jerome. By the end of 2023, a total of 621,591 people remained displaced within the country as a result of violence in both regions and around 90,000 people were refugees in neighbouring Nigeria, according to UNHCR data. In recent years, the violence has spread to the surrounding regions of Littoral, Centre and West due to the political and military movements' aim to expand the conflict beyond the two separatist regions. Different political and military groups met in Canada to unify their negotiating strategy alongside the exploratory contacts facilitated by Canada with government representatives of Cameroon.[85] Meanwhile, the leaders of the insurgent group Ambazonia Governing Council (AGovC), Ayaba Cho Lucas, and of the Nigerian rebel group Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Simon Ekpa, reached a military cooperation agreement in Helsinki. Explosions and the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) increased to

the highest level since November 2021. There was a rise in tension and violence on various notable dates, such as the eve of the elections to the Senate on 12 March, boycotted by the armed groups, which attacked civilians who had violated their boycott in the English-speaking regions; 20 May, National Day, considered a key anniversary marking the beginning of the conflict when the constitutional referendum repealed the Anglophone federal state of West Cameroon and the Francophone federal state of East Cameroon in 1972; the start of the school year in September, forcing the closure of schools; and 1 October, the anniversary of the declaration of independence of the self-proclaimed Federal Republic of Ambazonia. Thousands of people demonstrated throughout the country, calling for peace and reconciliation during the days running up to the National Day celebrations. Peace caravans led by singers, activists, clerics and traditional rulers called for an end to hate speech and armed conflict. In the capital, Yaoundé, thousands of Christians from Cameroon's Catholic, Presbyterian and Baptist churches joined the protest on 18 May.[86] Coinciding with National Day, separatist insurgents kidnapped around 30 women demonstrating against the armed groups' extortion of them. On 29 July, the separatist movement demanded a halt to all activities in Bamenda, declaring it a "dead city" in an attempt to disrupt the funeral of Cameroonian opposition leader Ni John Fru Ndi due to his bid for a united Cameroon.

OCHA indicated that 255 humanitarian organisations provided assistance to 2.7 million vulnerable people out of a total of 4.7 million in need of support. Nine of Cameroon's 10 regions continued to be affected by three complex humanitarian crises: the Lake Chad Basin conflict (affecting the Far North region), the North West and South West crisis and the impact of the influx of refugees from the CAR into the regions of East, Adamawa and North. In July, Amnesty International reported that security forces, separatist groups and ethnic self-defence militias, promoted or tolerated by the Cameroonian Army, which had instigated the Fulani Mbororo community against the English-speaking rebels, had committed atrocities in the region of North West, including cases of extrajudicial killing, torture and rape since 2020.[87] Finally, faced with the wave of coups d'état in Central and West Africa and after Gabonese President Ali Bongo Ondimba was ousted in late August, Cameroonian President Paul Biya replaced several colonels in the Cameroonian Army. Biya's party swept the Senate elections in March, with the president having used all the power of the state to benefit his party and limit freedom of expression. In control of 95% of the Senate, speculation continued about the nonagenarian leader's health and successor.

85. See the summary on Cameroon in chapter 2 (Peace negotiacions in Africa) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.
86. Kindzeka, Moki Edwin, 'Cameroon Calls for Peace, Reconciliation Ahead of Country's National Day', *Voice of America*, 18 May 2023.
87. Amnesty International, *Cameroon: with or against us: people of the North-West region of Cameroon caught between the army, armed separatists and militias*, 4 July 2023.

Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram)	
Start:	2011
Type:	System Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government of Nigeria, Civilian Joint Task Force pro-government milita, Boko Haram factions (ISWAP, JAS-Abubakar Shekau, Ansaru, Bakura), civilian militias, MNJTF (Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger)
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=

Summary:

The jihadist-inspired sect Boko Haram demands the establishment of an Islamic state in Nigeria and considers that Nigeria's public institutions are "westernised" and, therefore, decadent. The group forms part of the fundamentalist branch initiated by other groups in Nigeria following independence in 1960 and which, invariably, triggered outbreaks of violence of varying intensity. Despite the heavy repression to which its followers have been subjected —in 2009, at least 800 of its members died in confrontations with the army and the police in Bauchi State— the armed group remains active. The scope of its attacks has widened, aggravating insecurity in the country as the government proves incapable of offering an effective response to put an end to the violence. International human rights organizations have warned of the crimes committed by the group, but also on government abuses in its campaign against the organization. In 2015 the conflict expanded to the Lake Chad Basin and affected border areas of neighbouring countries with the Nigerian region: the Extrème Nord region in Cameroon, Diffa in Niger and the province of Lac in Chad. Since mid-2016 Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon have developed a regional strategy of military pressure on BH through the implementation of a regional joint military force (MNJTF), which has highlighted the group's resilience and also the unwillingness of the Nigerian political and military authorities to deal with the situation, in addition to the shortcomings of the Nigerian Armed Forces, which have serious internal corruption problems. BH has split into four factions: The Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad (JAS) faction, led by Abubakar Shekau, leader of BH since 2009; Ansaru, which aligned with al-Qaeda in 2012 and had not committed any military actions since 2013 until early 2020; Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), which split from JAS in 2016; and finally Bakura, an ISWAP splinter group that emerged in 2018 and subsequently moved closer to Shekau in opposition to ISWAP.

The activities of the different Boko Haram (BH) factions continued during the year in the Lake Chad basin region, which includes northeastern Nigeria (mainly Borno State, and to a lesser extent the states of Yobe and Adamawa), the Far North region in Cameroon, Diffa in Niger and Lac province in Chad, despite counterinsurgency operations. The violence caused new population displacements and human rights violations by all the armed actors involved, as noted by different human rights defence organisations. The conflict has caused around 40,000 fatalities since it began in 2011. According to the research centre ACLED, 3,828 deaths were reported in the Lake Chad basin region (the Nigerian states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa; the Far North region in Cameroon; Diffa in Niger; and Lac province in Chad) in 2023, a figure similar to that of 2022 (3,782) and slightly lower than in 2021 (4,163). Moreover, 1,310 violent events occurred in 2023, more than the 1,002 in 2022 and 982 in 2021.[88]

The Nigerian state of Bauchi, which borders the epicentre of the conflict in northeastern Nigeria, was also affected by the geographical spread of the insecurity and violence starting in September. Security had improved in recent years, but a spike in attacks by armed groups fleeing military operations in neighbouring states caused a new surge in violence. However, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) was less active in other north-central states (Kano, Kogi, Niger and Taraba) in 2023 compared to 2022.[89]

The Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS)[90] said that violent events caused by jihadists increased by a quarter during 2023 (to 1,208 armed actions), reaching 3,769 fatalities and reversing the decline in violence in the region since 2020. In 2020 and 2021, violence had fallen by around 32%. However, the conflict in the Lake Chad basin region remained the third deadliest in Africa, accounting for 16% of all deaths involving Islamist militants there, after the Western Sahel region and Somalia, according to the ACSS. Boko Haram and ISWAP were involved in almost all violent events connected to extremists in the region, while Ansaru, which operates in northwestern Nigeria, was virtually inactive. Boko Haram and ISWAP were involved in a roughly even amount of violent events, though they varied by type. ISWAP engaged more in battles and remote violence against security forces, while Boko Haram was responsible for 59% of the attacks against civilians. This corroborates previous reports that Boko Haram is the more violent of the two groups against civilians.

In an effort to control territory, resources and fighters, Boko Haram and ISWAP have been fighting each other as well as the national armies of the Lake Chad region. Therefore, **clashes increased between Boko Haram and ISWAP during the year as part of their battle for supremacy in the region. This intensification began with the death of Boko Haram's leader in 2021, following attacks in its stronghold in the Sambisa forest**. The deadliest fighting took place in August, when around 2100 combatants on both sides were killed near the town of Marte. According to the ICG, violence also escalated within both groups and inter-ethnic clashes among Boko Haram fighters claimed 82 lives in the Kukawa area in August. Meanwhile, ISWAP received

88. ACLED, Dashboard [Viewed on 31 January 2024].
89. See the summary on the Lake Chad region (Boko Haram) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Alert 2023! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2023.
90. Africa Center for Strategic Studies, *Deaths Linked to Militant Islamist Violence in Africa Continue to Spiral*, 29 January 2024.

supplies of weapons and fighters from its jihadist allies, Islamic State Sahel Province.

In Nigeria specifically, this situation co-existed with widespread violence and criminality experienced mainly in the northwest, where 3,600 people were kidnapped and many killed in 2023. In March, 1,506 combatants and their families surrendered and in May, another 511 did the same after fighting with the Nigerian Army, according to military sources. In northeastern Nigeria, the area most affected by the BH factions' activities, 2.3 million people are estimated to have been displaced by violence, a figure that UNHCR extends to practically 3.1 million displaced people and around 285,000 refugees and asylum seekers in the entire Lake Chad basin region.[91]

Malí	
Start:	2012
Type:	System, Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, the Permanent Strategic Framework (CSP) which brings together the armed groups affiliated with CMA (MNLA, MAA faction, CPA, HCUA) and Platform (GATIA, CMPFPR, MAA faction)–, The Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wa al-Muslimeen) (JNIM or GSIM), Islamic State in the West Africa Province (ISWAP) –also known as Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)-, Katiba Macina, MINUSMA, Russia, Wagner Group
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑

Summary:
The Tuareg community that inhabits northern Mali has lived in a situation of marginalisation and underdevelopment since colonial times which has fuelled revolts and led to the establishment of armed fronts against the central government. In the nineties, after a brief armed conflict, a peace agreement was reached that promised investment and development for the north. The failure to implement the agreement made it impossible to halt the creation of new armed groups demanding greater autonomy for the area. The fall of the regime of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya in 2011, which for several years had been sheltering the Malian Tuareg insurgency and had absorbed a number of its members into its security forces, created conditions that favoured the resurgence of Tuareg rebels in the north of the country, who demand the independence of Azawad (the name which the Tuareg give to the northern region of Mali). After making progress in gaining control of the area by taking advantage of the political instability in Mali in early 2012, the Tuareg armed group, National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), was increasingly displaced

by radical Islamist groups operating in the region which had made gains in the north of Mali. The internationalisation of the conflict intensified in 2013, following the military intervention of France and the deployment of a peacekeeping mission (MINUSMA) in the country. Although a peace agreement was signed in 2015 in the north of the country between the Arab-Tuareg groups (CMA and Platform), the exclusion of groups with jihadist agendas from the peace negotiations has kept the war going and extended the dynamics of the war to the central region of the country (Mopti).

The security situation in Mali continued to deteriorate during the year due to the resumption of the war in the northern part of the country between the Malian government, supported by the Russian private security company Wagner Group, and the Arab and Tuareg armed groups that had signed the 2015 Algiers peace agreement, organised under the Permanent Strategic Framework coalition (CSP). According to data from the ACLED research centre, 1,544 violent events (battles, violence against civilians and attacks with improvised explosive devices) were reported across the country in 2023. The attacks were concentrated in the northern and central regions and left 4,288 people dead, of which 1,848 lost their lives in northern Mali (Gao, Menaka, Timbuktu and Kidal).[92] These data show continuity with the dynamics of violence reported the previous year (1,340 violent events and 4,842 deaths). Though fewer deaths were observed, the number of violent episodes in the country increased due to the resumption of the war in the north, pitting the armed groups that had signed the peace agreement organised under the CSP, which brings together to CMA and Platform, against the Malian government in mid-August, opening a new front of instability. The deterioration of the security situation in the northern part of the country was exploited by jihadist coalitions active in the region (the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM or JNIM) and Islamic State in Greater Sahara (ISGS), also known as Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP)), which intensified violence in the north and maintained it in the central region (Mopti and Ségou). The rise in instability and insecurity remained in line with the trend of **the forced displacement of people and the humanitarian crisis**. According to UNHCR data on forced displacement in the country, by mid-2023 the number of refugees stood at 233,188, compared to 200,471 reported in mid-2022.[93] According to IOM data, 391,961 people had been internally displaced in the first quarter of the year, concentrated in the areas of Mopti (23%), Timbuktu (16%), Bandiagara (14%), Menaka (12 %), Gao (9%) and Ségou (9%).[94] All these data predate the resumption of hostilities in northern Mali, so by the end of the year the final figures are predicted to be much higher. Furthermore, violence and instability caused 7.1 million

91. UNHCR, Operational Data Portal, January 2024.
92. ACLED, Dashboard [Viewed on 19 February 2024].
93. UNHCR, "Refugee data Finger" [Viewed on 20 February 2024].
94. IOM, "Mali Crisis Response Plan 2023 – 2024" [Viewed on 20 February 2024].

people (32% of the population) to need humanitarian assistance and protection, mainly in northern and central Mali. In 2023, OCHA data showed that only around 30% of the 750 million USD needed to meet the Malian population's needs had been collected.[95]

Stability deteriorated the most in northern Mali. There, strain between the transitional authorities and the Arab and Tuareg armed movements began when the military junta came to power following the coup d'état in May 2021 and intensified in late 2022 with the CSP's announcement that it would cease its involvement in the implementation of the Algiers agreement because the military junta was blocking it. On 1 February 2023, the CSP coalition met with the peace agreement's Algerian-led international mediation mechanism and warned that it would take action if the Malian government continued to block the implementation of the peace agreement. In March, tensions increased due to the mobilisation of around 400 vehicles belonging to armed groups that had signed the agreement near the city of Anefis, in the Kidal region. The CSP claimed that the vehicles were used for operations against ISGS. Algeria mediated a detente between the parties, causing the Malian Minister of National Reconciliation to meet with representatives of CMA and Platform in Kidal on 12 May, repeating the government's commitment to the agreement. However, President Goïta's reshuffling of his cabinet on 1 July, which stripped away two of the four ministries that the peace agreement assigned to the groups that had signed it, and Bamako's announcement that it was revoking consent and closing the UN peacekeeping mission in the country (MINUSMA), led to the first armed clashes since the peace agreement was signed in 2015. These broke out in northern areas around Timbuktu, Kidal and Gao in early August between CMA and the Malian Army, which was aided by members of the Wagner Group. Later, on 11 September, CMA said that it considered itself "at war" with Bamako. The withdrawal of MINUSMA prompted clashes between the parties for control of the bases that the UN mission had been using. The most notable fighting was for control of the city of Anefis (Kidal) and the MINUSMA bases in Ber (Timbuktu), Aguelhok, Tessalit and Kidal (Kidal). In November, the Malian Army declared that it had captured the strategic city of Kidal, the base of the CSP, which complained that the Malian Army's presence in the region was a violation of the peace agreement that granted them control over it. The CSP responded by

The war in northern Mali resumed, pitting the government against Arab and Tuareg armed groups that had signed the 2015 Algiers peace agreement, organised under the Permanent Strategic Framework coalition

cutting off the roads leading to the major northern cities of Menaka, Kidal, Gao, Timbuktu and Taoudeni in an effort to increase pressure on government forces. The jihadist coalition GSIM also reestablished the blockade on Timbuktu that it had lifted in November. At the end of the year, MINUSMA completed the withdrawal of its troops with the handover of the Sévaré base (Mopti region) and the camp in Timbuktu. The outbreak of violence caused division within the CSP. In late September, the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA) announced that it was pulling out of the coalition due to the bellicose stance of CMA, claiming that the conflict only benefited the jihadists. Other CSP members also expressed their commitment to peace.

In the central region (Mopti and Ségou), the dynamics of violence went unchanged during the year. In May, the UN published a report on the Moura (Mopti) massacre that occurred in March 2022, concluding that the Malian Army and unspecified "foreign elements" killed about 500 civilians, noting that they could constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity. On 6 September, the GSIM announced that it had killed a dozen members of the Wagner Group in an ambush near the town of Pogo, in the Ségou region.

For one more year, the security crisis went hand in hand with the **deterioration of diplomatic relations between Mali's military junta and its former Western allies**. These disagreements, which have had an impact on the international security complex for years and resulted in the termination of the French-led anti-terrorist Operation Barkhane and of Europe's Takouba Task Force in the country in 2022, for example, ended in the withdrawal of MINUSMA in 2023 after operating there for 10 years, making it the UN mission with the second-most reported deaths (311), closely behind UNFIL (333).[96] The disagreements also led to stronger alliances between the Malian military junta and new actors. In February, the junta became closer with Russia, receiving a visit from Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, and with neighbouring countries led by military juntas (Burkina Faso and Niger). Bamako also signed different bilateral cooperation agreements with Moscow on security matters. On 16 September, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger created the Alliance of Sahel States (AoSS) and on 1 December they announced plans to form a confederation of three states and establish a stabilisation fund, an investment bank and, finally, a common currency.

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95. OCHA, "Mali" [Viewed on 20 February 2024].
96. United Nations Peacekeeping, "Fatalities" [Viewed on 11 March 2024].

Western Sahel Region	
Start:	2018
Type:	System, Resources, Identity International
Main parties:	Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Togo, Benin, Ivory Coast, G5-Sahel Joint Force (Mauritania, Chad, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso), Joint Task Force for the Liptako-Gourma Region (Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso), MINUSMA, France (Operation Barkhane), USA, Takouba Task Force (Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Mali, Netherlands, Niger, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and United Kingdom), Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM or GSIM), Islamic State in the Province of West Africa (ISWAP) - also known as Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Katiba Macina, Ansaroul Islam, other jihadist groups and community militias, Russia, Wagner Group
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑

Summary:

The Western Sahel region (northern Mali, northern Burkina Faso and northwestern Niger) is affected by a situation of growing instability caused by several different factors, including but not limited to cross-border criminal networks in the Sahel and the marginalisation and underdevelopment of nomadic Tuareg communities in the region. This marginalisation is rooted in the Tuareg rebellions that took place in the 1960s, in the 1990s and, more recently, between 2007 and 2009, when there were rebellions against the respective governments of Niger and Mali that sought to attain greater autonomy in both countries and reverse the poverty and underdevelopment of the region. In Mali, there was a resurgence of these demands in 2012, prompted by the fall of the Gaddafi regime in Libya in 2011. Meanwhile, the armed groups of Mali have expanded their activities to the Liptako-Gourma region. This expansion is related to the instability stemming from the spread of the jihadist insurgency of Algerian origin AQIM, its fragmentation and configuration into other similar types of armed groups, some aligned with al-Qaeda and others with ISIS, which currently operate and have expanded throughout the region. This expansion has contributed to further destabilisation in the area and to the creation of different regional and international cross-border military initiatives to try to control the situation, which have also helped to internationalise it. There are also links of the conflict affecting the Lake Chad region as a consequence of the expansion of Boko Haram's activity as a result of the cross-border military intervention.

The insecurity in the triple border region between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger remained critical, with episodes of violence continuing to take place amid the persistent crisis of governance in the region after the coup d'état in Niger in July 2023. According to data gathered by ACLED, a new uptick in violence was reported in the Liptako-Gourma triple border region during the year, which includes Mali, Burkina Faso and southwestern Niger's Tillabéri, Dosso and Tahoua regions, with 3,504 violent events (battles, violence against civilians and attacks with improvised explosive devices) that killed 13,634 people (compared to the 9,702 reported in 2022 and the 5,279 in 2021).[97] Even though Burkina Faso and Mali had a very similar number of violent events (1,699 and 1,544, respectively), the events in Burkina Faso were much deadlier (8,486 deaths compared to the 4,288 reported in Mali), accounting for 62% of all deaths caused by the conflict in the region. This is twice the number of people killed by violence in the country during the previous year (4,214), which had also doubled the number of fatalities reported in 2021 (2,290). The violence in Mali continued to be concentrated in the northern and central regions and while there was an observable decline in deaths (4,288, compared 4,842 in 2022), instability increased due to the resumption of the war in the north in mid-August between the Malian government and the armed groups that had signed the 2015 Algiers agreement, organised under the Permanent Strategic Framework (CSP) coalition.[98] Finally, the number of violent events in southwestern Niger (in Tillabéri, the main region affected by the violence, as well as in Dosso and Tahoua) remained in line with that of the previous year (261, compared to the 289 in 2022), but they were deadlier, causing 860 deaths compared to the 649 in 2022, accounting for 6% of all deaths in the region.

The Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS)[99] reported that the **deaths caused by violence involving jihadist groups across Africa**[100] increased by 20%, leaping from 19,412 in 2022[101] to 23,322 in 2023, doubling those reported in 2021. The Western Sahel region accounted for 50% of the total (11,643 deaths). This is a 43% increase over the previous year in the Western Sahel and nearly triple the levels observed in 2020, when the first military coup took place in the region. Violence specifically targeting civilians accounted for 35% of all attacks by jihadists in the Sahel, making it the region with the highest such levels in Africa. Once again, this rise in violence was due mainly to groups linked to the coalition of the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims – Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimin (GSIM or JNIM), particularly the Macina Liberation Front (FLM) and Ansaroul Islam, while Islamic State in Greater Sahara (ISGS) continued to have a minor impact, following the trend of 2021. The GSIM coalition was responsible for 81% of all deaths reported, a 67% increase over the previous year (9,195 compared to 5,499 in 2022). In contrast, ISGS-related deaths dropped by 7% in 2023 (2,448). For the third consecutive year, Burkina Faso

97. ACLED, Dashboard [Viewed on 19 February 2024].
98. See the summary on Mali in this chapter.
99. Africa Center for Strategic Studies, *Deaths Linked to Militant Islamist Violence in Africa Continue to Spiral*, 29 January 2024.
100. Includes the Western Sahel, Lake Chad, Somalia, North Africa and Mozambique – Cabo Delgado.
101. Africa Center for Strategic Studies, *Fatalities from Militant Islamist Violence in Africa Surge by Nearly 50 Percent*, 6 February 2023.

experienced the most violence in the region, suffering 67% of all deaths related to jihadist groups in the Sahel (7,762), over double the number of deaths reported in 2022. Niger experienced a 48% leap in deaths involving these groups (793). This figure includes the violence perpetrated by Boko Haram in the Diffa region of Niger, which is part of the conflict affecting the Lake Chad region,[102] most of which occurred after the coup d'état that took place in mid-2023. An increase in violence by jihadist groups was also reported in Benin during the year, doubling the number of violent events and deaths in the country, while the numbers in Togo held firm with 14 events and 69 deaths.

The surge in violence was mirrored by the **forced displacement of people in the region**. UNHCR estimated at mid-year that there were over 330,000 refugees and 2.5 million internally displaced people in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Burkina Faso continued to host most of the displaced population, with over 2 million internally displaced people, while lower figures were reported in Mali (375,000) and Niger (335,000), including the entire country.[103]

The security crisis continued to go hand in hand with **diplomatic tensions and the renewal of the systems of alliances and security in the region**. There was a coup in Niger in July that ousted President Mohamed Bazoum, the last Western ally in the region. The coup consolidated the military juntas across the Sahel after the coups in Mali and Burkina Faso. The miliary juntas' hold on power continued to strain relations with their West African neighbours, as well as with Western powers. Disagreements between the military juntas and their former Western allies, which have had an impact on the international security complex in the region for years, and primarily in Mali, resulted in the termination and withdrawal of the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in 2023. Niger also ended its defence and security cooperation agreements with the EU and with France, which withdrew its last soldiers on 22 December. Meanwhile, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger strengthened their alliances with Russia and made progress in forging a regional alliance. On 16 September, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger created the Alliance of Sahel States (AoSS) and on 1 December they announced plans to form a three-state confederation and establish a stabilisation fund, an investment bank and, finally, a common currency. On 2 December, Burkina Faso and Niger said that they were pulling out of the anti-jihadist G5 Sahel alliance, following in the footsteps of Mali, which had done the same in 2022.

Following the coup d'état in Niger in July 2023, all the countries sharing the Liptako-Gourma triple border region (Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso) were governed by military juntas

1.3.2 America

Colombia	
Start:	1964
Type:	System Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, ELN, Estado Mayor Central (EMC), Segunda Marquetalia, narco-paramilitary groups
Intensity:	2
Trend:	=

Summary:
In 1964, in the context of an agreement for the alternation of power between the Liberal party and the Conservative party (National Front), which excluded other political options, two armed opposition movements emerged with the goal of taking power: the ELN (made up of university students and workers, inspired by Guevara) and the FARC (a communist-oriented organisation that advocates agrarian reform). In the 1970s, various groups were created, such as the M-19 and the EPL, which ended up negotiating with the government and pushing through a new Constitution (1991) that established the foundations of a welfare state. At the end of the 1980s, several paramilitary groups emerged, instigated by sectors of the armed forces, landowners, drug traffickers and traditional politicians, aimed at defending the status quo through a strategy of terror. Drug trafficking activity influenced the economic, political and social spheres and contributed to the increase in violence. In 2016, the signing of a peace agreement with the FARC led to its demobilisation and transformation into a political party.

Violence in Colombia remained at high levels throughout the year despite the different ceasefire agreements that the government reached with several active armed groups and the open negotiations with the ELN and EMC.[104] According to data collected from the research centre ACLED, 1,934 people lost their lives as a consequence of all the violent events that took place in the country in 2023. Many of the deaths were caused by armed attacks committed by unidentified individuals against civilians, though they could not be attributed to any of the different armed opposition groups active in the country, while other attacks were carried out by paramilitary groups and armed groups involved in drug trafficking. The CELAC research centre indicated that 84 people died as a result of armed attacks attributed to the armed group ELN. The Indepaz organisation noted that 93 massacres were reported in which 300 people were killed in 2023, the same number of victims as the previous year. OCHA reported that there were less clashes between armed opposition groups and the Colombian Armed Forces during the year, but the

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102. See the summary on the Lake Chad region (Boko Haram) in this chapter.
103. UNHCR, *Mid-Year Trends 2023*, 25 October 2023.
104. See the summaries on the peace negotiations with the ELN and EMC in chapter 3 (Peace negotiations in America) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

levels of confrontation between the different active armed groups were similar to those during the previous year. OCHA also warned of the serious humanitarian consequences that the use of antipersonnel mines had on the conflict, which caused 95 fatalities, expressed concern about the confinement and reduced mobility of 88,000 people due to the activity of armed groups and the impact of the forced displacement of 63,200 people and reported an increase in the recruitment and use of 251 girls and boys by armed groups, 93% more than in 2022. Both the confinements and forced population displacements had a disproportionate (and the greatest) impact on indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) indicated that 320 victims of massacres were reported during 2023. The OHCHR blamed the massacres on non-state armed groups and criminal organisations and said they mainly affected the departments of Antioquia, Atlántico, Cauca, Magdalena, Nariño and Valle del Cauca. According to the report of the Ombudsman's Office, 181 social leaders and human rights activists (160 men and 21 women) were murdered during 2023. The humanitarian situation caused by the armed conflict was aggravated by the effects of climate change in the country, with droughts and floods in different areas.

The year began with an increase in clashes between the ELN and the Colombian security forces, despite the peace process under way, as well as hostilities between the ELN and Estado Mayor Central (EMC), a FARC dissident group that splintered off from the main group, especially in the department of Arauca. These latest clashes caused the death of 10 people in January, and were repeated throughout the year, causing dozens of fatalities and having serious impacts on the civilian population. In fact, although both groups were holding peace negotiations with Bogota separately, the government's negotiating delegations said that an understanding had to be reached between both groups that could lead to less violence. The ELN's most serious attack against the Colombian Armed Forces in a year and a half took place in March. A Colombian Army vehicle was attacked in North Santander, killing 10 soldiers and wounding nine. Armed clashes were also reported between different FARC dissident groups, the EMC and the Segunda Marquetalia. In the following months, fighting continued between the ELN and the security forces. However, as part of the peace negotiations, the government and the ELN signed a ceasefire agreement that was planned to start on 3 August. After it was signed, there was a significant decrease in violence. Still, clashes between different armed opposition groups and criminal organisations continued. In fact, after the ceasefire agreement between the ELN and the government was signed, clashes between the ELN and EMC intensified, leaving more than a dozen people dead in September. In October, the Colombian government and EMC signed a bilateral ceasefire agreement.

1.3.3. Asia and the Pacific

South Asia

Afghanistan	
Start:	2001
Type:	System Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, National Resistance Front of Afghanistan (NRF), ISIS-KP, Afghanistan Freedom Front (AFF)
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↓

Summary:
The country has lived with almost uninterrupted armed conflict since the invasion by Soviet troops in 1979, beginning a civil war between the armed forces (with Soviet support) and anti-Communist, Islamist guerrillas (Mujahideen). The withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1989 and the rise of the Mujahideen to power in 1992 in a context of chaos and internal confrontations between the different anti-Communist factions led to the emergence of the Taliban movement, which, at the end of the nineties, controlled almost all Afghan territory. In November 2001, after the Al-Qaeda attacks of 11 September, and the refusal of the Taliban government to hand over Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders (on Afghan territory) the US attacked the country aided by a contingent of British forces. After the signing of the Bonn agreements, an interim government was established, led by Hamid Karzai and subsequently ratified at the polls. Since 2006 there has been an escalation of violence, motivated by the rebuilding of the Taliban militias. Following the 2014 presidential and provincial elections, the country was plunged into a crisis sparked by allegations of electoral fraud after the second round in which the two most voted leaders, Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, kept the results in the air for months. In September, an agreement was reached to create a two-headed government with Ghani as president and Abdullah as chief executive. In 2011, the international troops began their withdrawal, which was completed at the end of 2014, although the mission "Resolute Support" was deployed on the ground, with a NATO mandate to train Afghan forces and another force to carry out training and counterterrorism operations, made up of US soldiers, "Freedom Sentinel" mission. In 2021, after a significant escalation of violence, the Taliban rose to power again and all international troops were withdrawn from the country.

Violence continued in Afghanistan, but it declined observably throughout the year. According to the research centre ACLED, 998 deaths were reported as a result of armed violence during 2023, considerably fewer than the 3,970 in 2022 and far below the 42,000 in 2021. A significant portion of the civilian deaths resulted from repression by the Taliban security forces against people actively involved in the previous administration or who had direct contact with international organisations or international security forces deployed in the country after the US invasion of 2001, as well as human rights and women's rights activists. Most of the attacks that took place during the year were carried out by the

regional affiliate of ISIS, ISIS-KP, which targeted the Afghan security forces and members of the government, though its activity slowed down throughout the year. The International Crisis Group noted that improvements in the Taliban government's counterinsurgency capacities reduced the number of attacks by ISIS-KP and the number of related deaths.[105] Although the United Nations stated during the first half of the year that ISIS-KP was the greatest terrorist threat in Afghanistan and the South Asian region, adding that its operational capacity called the Taliban regime's ability to maintain security in the country into question,[106] fewer attacks by ISIS-KP were noticed in early 2024, followed by an increase in the Taliban government's counterinsurgency operations in the second half of the year.[107] In fact, the Taliban security forces conducted several different security operations in which they detained and killed dozens of ISIS-KP members.

ISIS-KP's attacks during the year included a suicide attack that took place in Kabul in January against a convoy of the Minister of Defence that killed 20 members of the security forces and civilians. Days later, another 20 people died in a suicide attack near the Ministry of Foreign Affairs while a Chinese delegation was visiting. In March, ISIS-KP killed the governor of Balkh province. The Taliban government claimed to have killed ISIS-KP's second-in-command, as well as the head of intelligence and operations, responsible for the major attacks that took place in Kabul early in the year. Sporadic clashes and armed attacks by different groups opposed to the Taliban regime such as the NRF and the AFF were also reported, though to a lesser extent than in previous years, especially in the case of the NRF. The UN Secretary-General's December report stated that these groups had carried out fewer attacks than in other periods, that their activities did not pose any security threat to the Taliban authorities and that there had been fewer gunfights than in previous periods.[108] Alongside the armed violence, Afghanistan continued to be affected by a major humanitarian crisis aggravated by the effects of climate change. According to different studies, Afghanistan is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to the consequences of the climate crisis owing to the impact of droughts and the local authorities' inability to respond. Meanwhile, women and girls continued to suffer serious human rights violations due to extremely discriminatory legislation and practices imposed by the Taliban government.

India (CPI-M)	
Start:	1967
Type:	System Internal
Main parties:	Government, CPI-M (naxalites)
Intensity:	1
Trend:	=

Summary:
The armed conflict in which the Indian government confronts the armed Maoist group the CPI-M (known as the Naxalites, in honour of the town where the movement was created) affects many states in India. The CPI-M emerged in West Bengal at the end of the sixties with demands relating to the eradication of the land ownership system, as well as strong criticism of the system of parliamentary democracy, which is considered as a colonial legacy. Since then, armed activity has been constant and it has been accompanied by the establishment of parallel systems of government in the areas under its control, which are basically rural ones. Military operations against this group, considered by the Indian government as terrorists, have been constant. In 2004, a negotiation process began which ended in failure. In the following years there was an escalation of violence that led the government to label the conflict as the main threat to national security. Since 2011 there has been a significant reduction in hostilities.

The armed conflict between the Indian security forces and the Naxalite insurgency continued, affecting several states in India, though it remained less intense than it had been in the past. According to death tolls compiled by the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), 150 people died due to the violence of the armed conflict in 2023. This figure was similar to that of 2022, when 135 people lost their lives. Most of those who died because of the armed conflict (61) were civilians, according to data collected by the SATP, surpassing the number of security force members (31) and insurgents (58). Again, the state most affected by violence was Chhattisgarh, where 88 people died as a result of the conflict, over half the total. The states of Jharkhand, Odisha, Maharashtra and others were also affected. Official data also confirmed the drop in violence and associated deaths that had occurred in previous years. Indian Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai noted that the number of violent incidents had fallen by 36% between 2018 to 2022 and that there were 59% fewer fatalities among members of the security forces and civilians over the same period. The number of states affected by armed violence also decreased. However, sporadic clashes, attacks and security force operations continued and human rights organisations also complained about violations civilians' rights in the context of the armed

105. International Crisis Group, *The Taliban's Neighbourhood: Regional Diplomacy with Afghanistan*, Report No. 337, 30 January 2024.
106. UN Secretary-General, *Seventeenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat* (S/2023/568), 12 August 2023.
107. UN Secretary-General, *Eighteenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat* (S/2024/117), 31 January 2024.
108. UN Secretary-General *The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security Report of the Secretary-General,* (A/78/628-S/2023/94), 11 December 2023.

conflict. The most serious episode of violence took place in April, in Dantewada, one of the districts of the state of Chhattisgarh most affected by violence. The detonation of an explosive device on a road when security forces vehicle passed by killed 10 police officers and a civilian participating in an operation against the Naxalite insurgency. It was the most serious attack in the state in recent years. Some incidents of violence also occurred during the state assembly election period, especially in the state of Chhattisgarh.

India (Jammu and Kashmir)	
Start:	1989
Type:	Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Governments, Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, Jaish-e-Muhammad, United Jihad Council, Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), The Resistance Front (TRF)
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓

Summary:
The armed conflict in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir has its origin in the dispute over the region of Kashmir which, since the independence and division of India and Pakistan, has confronted both states. On three occasions (1947 to 1948; 1965 and 1971) these countries had suffered from armed conflicts, with both of them claiming sovereignty over the region, divided between India, Pakistan and China. The armed conflict between India and Pakistan in 1947 gave rise to the current division and creation of a de facto border between both countries. Since 1989, the armed conflict has been moved to the interior of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, where a whole host of rebel groups, in favour of the complete independence of the state or unconditional adhesion to Pakistan, confront the Indian security forces. Since the beginning of the peace process between India and Pakistan in 2004, there has been a considerable reduction in the violence, although the armed groups remain active.

Violence in the armed conflict in Jammu and Kashmir fell significantly with a drop in the death toll associated with the violence. According to data collected by the South Asia Terrorism Portal, 134 people died in 2023 as a result of armed clashes between Indian security forces and Kashmiri insurgent groups operating in the region. Eighty-seven were insurgents, 12 were civilians, 33 were members of the security forces and two were unspecified. This is in line with the decrease in the number of deaths since 2020, when 321 fatalities were reported, a figure that has fallen each year since then. The research centre ACLED reported similar figures and indicated that there were 155 deaths as a result of armed violence in the same period. Clashes did continue throughout the year, despite the Indian government's rhetoric that the conflict was practically over, saying that since it suspended Jammu and Kashmir's statehood, the

decrease in violence has been constant and the security forces have gained almost total control over the armed groups. Though in the first few months of the year there were hardly any clashes as a result of the winter weather conditions in the region, especially in the mountainous areas, armed incursions by insurgent groups and security force operations were repeated in the second half of the year. In fact, in February it was reported to the media that the government was studying the withdrawal of the Indian Armed Forces deployed in Jammu and Kashmir (approximately 130,000 soldiers), keeping only those deployed along the Line of Control, the de facto border with Pakistan (around 80,000 soldiers). The withdrawn military forces would be replaced by the Central Reserve Police Force, which specialises in counterinsurgency. However, this possibility was ruled out in May, given the rise in armed group activity. The deadliest attack in the region since 2021 had taken place in April. Five soldiers died in an attack on a military truck in the Rajouri sector. In the following months, insurgent groups attacked military and police targets multiple times. In addition, security forces intercepted armed groups' attempts to infiltrate from Pakistan, especially in the Kupwara district. Clashes near the Line of Control between security forces and members of the People's Anti-Fascist Front left six Indian soldiers dead in May and five insurgents were killed in clashes with security forces while trying to infiltrate Kupwara district in June. In December, after an attack on two Indian Army vehicles that killed five soldiers and wounded two others, a security force operation began in which eight civilians were arrested. Three of them died the day after their arrest, leading to allegations of torture and mistreatment by family members. The most active armed groups were Lashkar-e-Tayyba, its affiliate Resistance Front and Hizbul Mujahideen. Dozens of members of these groups were detained in security force operations throughout the year. Meanwhile, the Indian Supreme Court upheld the Indian government's decision to withdraw statehood status from Jammu and Kashmir.

Pakistan	
Start:	2001
Type:	System Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, Armed Forces, intelligence services, Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), ISIS-KP
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑

Summary:
The armed conflict affecting the country is a result of the intervention in Afghanistan in 2001. Initially, the conflict played out in the area including the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber-Paktunkhwa Province (formerly called the North-West Frontier Province). After the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan, members of its

Government and militias, as well as several insurgent groups of different nationalities, including Al-Qaeda, found refuge in Pakistan, mainly in several tribal agencies, although the leadership was spread out over several towns (Quetta, Lahore or Karachi). While Pakistan initially collaborated with the US in the search for foreign insurgents (Chechens, Uzbeks) and members of al-Qaeda, it did not offer the same cooperation when it came to the Taliban leadership. The dissatisfaction of various groups of Pakistani origin who were part of the Taliban insurgency led to the creation in December 2007 of the Pakistani Taliban movement (Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, TTP), which began to commit attacks in the rest of Pakistan against both state institutions and civilians. With violence rising to previously unknown levels, and after a series of attacks that specifically targeted the Shiite, Ahmadiyya and Christian minorities, and to a lesser extent Sufis and Barelvis, public opinion turned in favour of eliminating the terrorist sanctuaries. In June 2014 the Army launched operation Zarb-e Azb to eradicate insurgents from the agencies of North and South Waziristan. Following the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in 2021, the armed conflict in Pakistan intensified.

The armed conflict between Pakistani security forces and the Pakistani Taliban TTP insurgency intensified during the year after November 2022, when the TTP ended the ceasefire agreement they had reached a few months earlier. Violence persisted amid an intense political crisis since the dismissal of Prime Minister Imran Khan in 2022. Clashes, attacks and security force operations took place throughout the year, which were mainly concentrated in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the most affected by violence in the entire country. Thus, the trend of increasing violence was confirmed and aggravated in Pakistan since the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan. The Center for Research and Security Studies in Pakistan noted that 2023 was the year when the most security force members were reportedly killed in the previous decade and also pointed to an increase in suicide attacks. It also reported that a total of 1,524 people had died as a result of violence in the country as a whole, compared to 980 in 2022. The total body count linked to the armed conflict in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province was 979, while the previous year it had been 633. Meanwhile, ACLED reported 2,125 total deaths in 2023, of which 1,262 were in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Taliban insurgency did not limit its activity to this province and episodes of violence by the TTP were also reported in other parts of the country, such as in Karachi, the capital of the province of Sindh. The Pakistani government's accusations that the Taliban authorities in Afghanistan were supporting the Pakistani Taliban armed group TTP, together with the intensification of the repatriation of tens of thousands of Afghan refugees and migrants residing in Pakistan, led to an increase in tension between both countries.

The year began with an attack on a mosque in Peshawar, the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, that caused the death of more than 84 people, making it one of the most serious attacks of 2023. Since the mosque was inside a police facility, most of those killed were police officers. The attack was blamed on a local faction of the armed group TTP. In the weeks before and after, there were many episodes of violence in which dozens of insurgents, police and soldiers died. According to the analysis of the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies, the TTP was the most active armed group in the country during the year, responsible for most attacks against Pakistani security forces. In April, the government announced a national operation aimed at putting an end to attacks by armed groups, as announced by the National Security Committee. However, the armed actions of the TTP and other groups operating in the country continued in the following weeks. In August, a suicide attack on a military convoy killed nine soldiers in Bannu district, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. There was also another extremely serious attack in December, a suicide bombing against military installations in the Dera Ismail Khan district that killed 23 soldiers and wounded over 30.

The armed conflict between the Pakistani security forces and the Taliban armed group TTP intensified

Attacks were also launched by KP, the ISIS affiliate operating in the region. One of the most serious occurred on 31 July, when a suicide bomb during a political event of the Islamist party Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl in the Bajaur district, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, killed over 63 people and wounded more than 100. In September, an attack during a religious event in Mastung district in the province of Balochistan killed 55 people.

Pakistan (Balochistan)	
Start:	2005
Type:	Self-government, Identity, Resources Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, BLA, BNA, BLF and BLT; LeJ, TTP, ISIS-KP
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑

Summary:
Since the creation of the state of Pakistan in 1947, Balochistan, the richest province in terms of natural resources, but with some of the highest levels of poverty in the country, has suffered from four periods of armed violence (1948, 1958, 1963-69 and 1973-77) in which the rebel forces stated their objective of obtaining greater autonomy and even independence. In 2005, the armed rebel forces reappeared on the scene, basically attacking infrastructures linked to the extraction of gas. The opposition armed group, BLA, became the main opposing force to the presence of the central government, which it accused of making the most of the wealth of the province without giving any of it back to the local population. As a result of the resurgence of the armed opposition, a military operation was started in 2005 in the province, causing displacement of the civilian population and armed confrontation. In parallel, a movement of the civilian population calls clarifying the disappearance of hundreds, if not thousands, of Baluchi at the hands of the security forces of the State.

The armed conflict in the Pakistani province of Balochistan intensified throughout the year and both the amount of violent events and the number of people killed as a result of the violence there increased. Balochistan was the second most affected province by violence in Pakistan during 2023, according to data collected by the Pakistani Center for Research and Security Studies. According to this organisation, 399 people died in 2023 as a result of armed clashes between the insurgent groups and the security forces, attacks that occurred throughout the year and security force operations. Thus, the increasing violence that had already been observed in the previous year was consolidated, influenced by the regional context after the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan and growing opposition to foreign investment in the province, especially from China. The research centre ACLED estimated that 659 people died as a result of armed violence in the province, slightly fewer than those in 2022. Alongside the activity of the Balochi nationalist insurgent groups, there were also armed actions by Taliban groups and ISIS-KP, responsible for an attack during a religious event in Mastung district in which 55 people died in September. The most active Balochi armed group in the conflict was the BLA, as was the case in previous years, which carried out different armed attacks against the Pakistani security forces. The most serious attacks include the explosion of a bomb that killed four police officers and wounded nine other people in the city of Quetta in March. Hours before, a police car had also been attacked in Quetta. There was a third attack against a police patrol in Quetta a few hours later, though no victims were reported in either of these two other attacks. The most serious attack of the year occurred in Gwadar district in November, when 14 soldiers died in an ambush against two security force vehicles. The armed group BLA was blamed for the attack. This district was rocked by different episodes of violence throughout the year. Alongside the attacks and armed clashes, civil society organisations continued to complain about serious human rights violations linked to the armed conflict, such as forced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and false positives (the violent deaths of civilians presented as the violent deaths of insurgents).

South-east Asia and Oceania

Philippines (Mindanao)	
Start:	1991
Type:	Self-government, Identity, System Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, Abu Sayyaf, BIFF, Islamic State of Lanao/Dawlah Islamiyah/Maute Group, Ansar Khilafah, Toraife Group, MILF and MNLF factions
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓

Summary:
The current situation of violence in Mindanao, where several armed groups are confronting the Government and,

occasionally each other, is closely linked to the long-lasting armed conflict between Manila and the MNFL, and later the MILF, two organizations fighting for the self-determination of the Moro people. The failure to implement the 1996 peace agreement with the MNLF meant that some factions of this group have not fully demobilized and sporadically take part in episodes of violence, while the difficulties that emerged during the negotiation process between the MILF and the Government encouraged the creation of the BIFF, a faction of the group that opposes this process and was created in 2010 by the former commander of the MILF, Ameril Umbra Kato. On another front, since the 90s, the group Abu Sayyaf has been fighting to create an independent Islamic state in the Sulu archipelago and the western regions of Mindanao (south). Initially this group recruited disaffected members of other armed groups like the MILF or the MNLF, but then moved away ideologically from both organizations and resorted more and more systematically to kidnappings, extortion and bomb attacks, which lead the group to be included on the USA and EU lists of terrorist organizations. Finally, it is important to note that the emergence of ISIS on the international scene led to the emergence of many groups in Mindanao that swore allegiance and obedience to ISIS. In 2016, this group claimed authorship for the first large attack in Mindanao and announced its intentions to strengthen its structure and increase its attacks in the region.

The Philippine government declared that **many of the armed organisations operating in various parts of Mindanao had clearly become weaker in 2023, but they continued to fight with the state security forces. Episodes of violence between the different groups and attacks against civilians were also reported throughout the year**. Although there were no official figures on fatalities associated with the armed conflict, the research centre ACLED noted that 230 people lost their lives in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), 63 in Central Mindanao (which includes the provinces of Cotabato, South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani and General Santos) and 29 in the Zamboanga region, which includes the Sulu archipelago (one of the areas historically most affected by violence). In late July, **the head of the Philippine Armed Forces declared that the number of Islamist fighters had fallen drastically since 2017 and said that he was optimistic about the possibility of having militarily defeated the armed groups linked to Islamic State**. Specifically, he said that in the previous two years no kidnapping had been reported, the number of foreign fighters had fallen (which some military intelligence sources even put at between 100 and 200 in 2023) and the number of combatants who had surrendered or accepted disarmament and demobilisation had increased exponentially. In Central Mindanao alone, 914 members of Dawlah Islamiya, the BIFF and the NPA surrendered in 2023. Along the same lines, in late July, President Ferdinand Marcos lifted the state of emergency that had been proclaimed by previous President Rodrigo Duterte in September 2016 to address the high levels of violence in the region. Subsequently, in May 2017, the government had proclaimed martial law in Mindanao to confront a months-long siege conducted by several Islamist armed groups in the city of Marawi, some of

whose neighbourhoods were completely destroyed. Martial law was lifted in December 2019, after the government had neutralised several of these groups. The Marcos administration lifted the state of emergency, claiming that state security force operations had helped to restore peace and order in the parts of Mindanao most affected by the conflict.

One of the armed groups active in Mindanao in recent decades that was **affected the most by counterinsurgency operations during 2023 was Abu Sayyaf. In fact, in September, the governor of Sulu province (one of the group's main strongholds) declared the province free of Abu Sayyaf's members and influence.** The governor's claim was supported by the Sulu Provincial Task Force to End Local Armed Conflict (PTF-ELAC) and by the Philippine Armed Forces in the region, which indicated that 966 Abu Sayyaf fighters had voluntarily surrendered (handing over 559 firearms) and that 52 municipalities affected by the group's activity had been "liberated". The group's main leaders also died during the year. In early December, Mudzrimar Sawadjaan, also known as Mundi, died in a gunfight in the area around the municipality of Tipo-Tipo, in Basilan province. Sawadjaan was the leader of one of the Abu Sayyaf factions operating in Sulu province and the government considered him the person who introduced the use of suicide attacks. He had been blamed for orchestrating some of the group's deadliest attacks in recent years, such as the bomb attack on the Jolo cathedral in 2019 that killed 23 people and wounded several hundred and two bomb attacks in central Jolo in 2020 in which 14 people died and more than 70 were wounded. According to military sources, Sawadjaan had been protected by BIFF fighters in Maguindanao province in recent months. Previously, in late May, the Philippine Armed Forces declared that Radullan Sahiron had died. He was one of the group's founders and the oldest active Abu Sayyaf leader at the time of his death. In fact, Sahiron assumed leadership of the group in 2006, after the death of Gaddafi Janjalani, who in turn had succeeded his brother and founder of the group, Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani. Sahiron, who was one of the most wanted people by the US government since the early 1990s, led one of the Abu Sayyaf factions that had not sworn allegiance to Islamic State, as other armed groups in the region had done. The Philippine Armed Forces acknowledged that they did not have Sahiron's body, though they stated with 90% confidence that he had died in the southern city of Patikul. Finally, Nurudin Muddalan died in a firefight with the Philippine Armed Forces in Ungkaya Pukan, Basilan province, in mid-June. Muddalan became the leader of one of the Abu Sayyaf factions in Basilan following the death of the group's historical leader Furuji Indama in 2020. He had participated in some major episodes of violence, such as an ambush in Tipo-Tipo in which 15 soldiers were killed and another 13 were wounded.

Military sources claimed during the year that the number of the BIFF's combatants could have fallen in recent years from between 300 and 400 to under 100, and that the group is currently organised into three main factions, led respectively by Ismael Abubakar (Imam Bongos), Ustadz Karialan (Imam Minimbang) and Esmael Abdulmalik, also known as Abu Toraife. According to some media outlets, Abu Toraife was proclaimed leader of Islamic State in the Philippines and emir of South-east Asia in August, though it was not clear whether he had obtained support from all the groups and factions that have sworn allegiance to Islamic State in recent years. Abu Toraife's rise to power came after the death of Faharudin Hadji Satar (also known as Abu Zacharia) in an armed confrontation in Marawi (Lanao del Sur province) in mid-June. In 2019, Zacharia had succeeded Owaida Marohombsar (also known as Abu Dar), the head of the Maute Group (or Dawlah Islamiyah), as the leader and emir of Islamic State. Though the Maute Group has been one of the most active insurgent groups in Mindanao in recent years (especially in Lanao del Sur), it participated in fewer episodes of violence than in previous years. However, it did continue to threaten security in certain parts of Mindanao, according to the government. In early December, for example, Manila accused the group of carrying out an attack during a Catholic mass held at Mindanao State University in which four people died and 45 others were wounded. President Marcos said that the attack had been carried out by foreign terrorists, while the Philippine Armed Forces indicated that it could have been an act of revenge for the military operation that had killed 11 combatants in the city of Datu Hoffer Ampatuan a few days earlier. After the attack on the university, the Philippine Armed Forces carried out an air and ground offensive in the provinces of Maguindanao and Cotabato (especially in the Ligawasan area) in which at least nine combatants were killed and many others were wounded. At around the same time, the Maute Group carried out several attacks against the MILF in the Ligawasan area in which 11 MILF members died. Previously, in September, clashes had already been reported between the MILF and the Maute Group in Datu Hoffer Ampatuan. Throughout the year, there were clashes between two MILF base commands (105 and 118), displacing thousands of people and resulting in the deaths of several combatants (in December, for example, nine militants from both groups were killed in several days of fighting in the town of Mamasapano). There was also sporadic fighting between combatants from the 118th Command of the MILF and the BIFF, such as those that occurred in November in the province of Maguindanao del Sur, which displaced hundreds of people in the region. Finally, there were also some clashes between members of different MNLF factions, such as the one that in November that caused the death of two former combatants in the province of Cotabato.

Philippines (NPA)	
Start:	1969
Type:	System Internal
Main parties:	Government, NPA
Intensity:	1
Trend:	=

Summary:

The NPA, the armed branch of the Communist party of the Philippines, started the armed fight in 1969 which reached its zenith during the 1980s under the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos. Although the internal purges, the democratisation of the country and the offers of amnesty weakened the support and the legitimacy of the NPA at the beginning of the 1990s, it is currently calculated that it is operational in most of the provinces in the country. After the terrorist attacks of 11th September 2001, its inclusion in the list of terrorist organisations of the USA and the EU greatly eroded confidence between the parties and, to a good degree, caused the interruption of the peace conversations with Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's government. The NPA, whose main objective is to access power and the transformation of the political system and the socio-economic model, has as its political references the Communist Party of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front (NDF), which bring together various Communist organisations. The NDF has been holding peace talks with the government since the early 1990s.

Despite the fact that the government and the NDF pledged to resume peace negotiations in November after they had been interrupted since 2017, many clashes took place between state security forces and NPA combatants throughout the year. Research centres estimated death tolls of at least 170 people, though the real number could be much higher. Clashes occurred in the three main regions of the country (in Luzon, in the north; in Visayas, in the centre; and in Mindanao, in the south), especially in Negros Occidental, Samar, the Panay Islands (Visayas), Abra, Mindoro, Quezon, Batangas and Bicol (Luzon), Caraga, Sultan Kudarat, Surigao and Bukidnon (Mindanao). The months with the greatest armed activity, leaving more than 20 fatalities, were April, May, September and December. **On 31 December, the Philippine Armed Forces declared that by 2023 they had managed to dismantle eight NPA fronts and weaken another 14, so that by early 2024 only 11 weakened NPA fronts remained (especially in Visayas and Mindanao), with an estimated strength of fewer than 1,500 combatants, the fewest since the armed group was created in 1969**. According to the Philippine Armed Forces, 1,751 firearms were seized or handed over and 1,399 members of the NPA were neutralised, including 67 important ones in 2023. In fact, in April the NPA finally acknowledged the death of Benito Tiamzon and Wilma Austria, two of the most

prominent historical leaders of the armed movement in recent decades. However, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) said that they had not died in a gunfight with the Philippine Armed Forces in Visayas in August 2022, but rather had been captured, tortured and later put on a boat that was detonated by remote control. Both leaders died four months before the death of the founder of the Communist Party and the NPA, Jose Maria Sison. After both events, the Philippine Armed Forces said that the group had been weakening at a quickening pace in recent years and that it was in its death throes and falling apart. Several government and military officials commented on the state's ability to impose itself militarily on the NPA during the year. In July, for example, **President Ferdinand Marcos declared that by the end of the year, all operational fronts of the NPA would have been dismantled, expressing his conviction that before the end of 2023, the sole province where the NPA was active (Northern Samar) would be free of Communists and their influence**. At the end of the year, a spokesperson for the Philippine Armed Forces said that over 3,400 NPA members had surrendered to the government authorities between January and September 2023 alone, adding that government programmes for demobilising and reintegrating combatants were running smoothly. Manila declared that since it set a new counterinsurgency and conflict management policy in 2018, practically all the movement's 89 fronts throughout the country at the time had been dismantled and 8,654 NPA members had been neutralised, including 314 leaders, meaning that the group's presence and influence had been eliminated in more than 4,500 municipalities.

In December, the CCP decreed a two-day ceasefire (25 and 26 December) to mark the Christmas holidays and the 55th anniversary of the party's founding. The government described the ceasefire announcement as meaningless and unnecessary and blasted a statement issued by the CCP declaring the primacy of armed struggle to achieve transformation, ordering the NPA to gather strength and increase its fight against the Philippine government and depicting the peace talks as an additional battlefield for advancing their objectives. However, the part of the CCP's statement that created the most controversy was its announcement of the Third Rectification Movement, after the first one in the 1960s, which culminated with the refoundation of the Communist Party in 1968, and the second one in the early 1990s. According to the CCP, the Third Rectification Movement aims to overcome the ideological, political and organisational mistakes, weaknesses and shortcomings that the CCP had identified in recent years (especially since 2016) that would have hindered its growth and the progress of the revolution.

Myanmar	
Start:	1948
Type:	Self-government, Identity, System
	Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, armed groups (Ceasefire signatories: ABSDF, ALP, CNF, DKBA, KNU, KNU/KNLA-PC, PNLO, RCSS, NMSP, LDU; Non-signatories: KIA, NDAA, MNDAA, SSPP/SSA, TNLA, AA, UWSA, ARSA, KNPP), PDF
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑

Summary:

Since 1948, dozens of armed insurgent groups of ethnic origin have confronted the government of Myanmar, demanding recognition of their particular ethnic and cultural features and calling for reforms in the territorial structure of the State or simply for independence. Since the start of the military dictatorship in 1962, the armed forces have been fighting armed groups in the ethnic states. These groups combined demands for self-determination for minorities with calls for democratisation shared with the political opposition. In 1988, the government began a process of ceasefire agreements with some of the insurgent groups, allowing them to pursue their economic activities (basically trafficking in drugs and precious stones). However, the military operations have been constant during these decades, particularly directed against the civil population in order to do away with the armed groups' bases, leading to the displacement of thousands of people. In 2011 the Government began to approach the insurgency and since then there has been a ceasefire agreements with almost all of the armed groups. In February 2021, Myanmar's military leaders carried out a coup d'état that ended the transition to democracy in the country and led to an intensification of the armed conflict and the emergence of the People's Defence Force (PDF), an umbrella organisation that brings together dozens of armed groups opposed to the military regime, while clashes with ethnic insurgencies persisted.

The armed conflict in Myanmar remained at high levels of violence throughout the year and there was a serious escalation of violence in October. Fighting continued throughout the year between the Burmese security forces and the different active ethnic armed groups, as well as the People's Defence Force (PDF), which emerged after the 2021 military coup d'état. According to figures compiled by the research centre ACLED, 15,625 people died in 2023 as a result of the armed conflict in the country, fewer than the 19,324 in 2022. ACLED also reported that there was a considerable rise in the number of clashes during the second half of the year. The United Nations Office of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) indicated that one third of Myanmar's population (18.6 million people, of which 6 million were children and 52% were women and girls) required humanitarian aid. This was one million more than in

The armed conflict in Myanmar seriously escalated in October, with several armed groups working together in the largest offensive against the Burmese Armed Forces since the 2021 coup d'état

2022 and 19 times the number of people who required such aid before the military coup in 2021. In addition, almost two million people were internally displaced, according to figures from UNHCR, half a million more than in the previous year. The humanitarian crisis resulting from the armed conflict was also made worse by the effects of climate change in one of the countries in the world with the highest risk of suffering extreme climate events, according to data from previous years.[109]

Since the start of the year, the Philippine Armed Forces launched air strikes in various states that killed hundreds and forcibly displaced thousands. However, **the armed conflict reached a turning point in October, when the groups composing the Three Brotherhood Alliance (the Kokang armed group MNDAA, the Ta'ang armed group TNLA and the Arakan armed group AA) launched Operation 1027 (in reference to its start on 27 October) in northern Shan State.** The operation was the largest offensive against the Burmese security forces after the 2021 coup d'état. The insurgent groups captured several cities and interrupted circulation along different routes connecting the country with China, making a significant commercial impact. The initial objective of this armed offensive, led by the MNDAA, was to regain control of the Kokang Self-Administered Zone, which the armed group had held until 2009. This is a crucial area for the illegal gambling business and many illicit activities linked to Internet scams controlled by criminal groups. Thousands of members of armed groups participated in the operation, with the support of several groups linked to the PDF. The attacks were carried out simultaneously in several parts of the state, without the security forces being able to respond to them adequately. Although the Burmese Armed Forces later conducted air strikes in response, the insurgent groups managed to capture many strategic locations. Moreover, armed groups from other parts of the country took advantage of the regime's military weakness to initiate operations in other states, such as KIO attacks in the Sagaing Region, AA attacks in Kayah State and even AA attacks in Rakhine State, causing the informal ceasefire that had been established since 2022 to break down. The increasing violence forcibly displaced more than 300,000 people, worsening the humanitarian situation in the country. After this outbreak of violence, China encouraged negotiations between the parties, trying to broker a ceasefire that was initially agreed on 11 December.[110] However, this agreement failed to end the fighting.

In the previous months, clashes had been reported in the northern states of the country, especially in Kachin State, Chin State and Shan State, and in the Sagaing Region, and in eastern Myanmar, in Kayin State. The Burmese

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109. Myanmar was the country with the second highest climate risk in the world from 2000 to 2019, according to the 2021 Global Climate Risk Index.
110. See the summary on Myanmar in chapter 4 (Peace negotiations in Asia) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

Armed Forces bombed the positions of the armed groups, which responded with ambushes, attacks and assaults against infrastructure. Particularly serious was an air strike in April against the town of Kanbalu, in the Sagaing Region, in which 170 civilians died. The air strike occurred during the inauguration of some offices of the National Unity Government, which formed after the coup d'état in opposition to the military regime. In July, the KIO launched an attack in Shan State that was the first armed action against security forces in several months. This triggered an escalation in fighting that continued in later months when the TNLA also conducted attacks after several months of military inactivity. In August, the KNU noted that the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was no longer in effect, though seven of the 10 groups that had signed it remained in contact with the government under the NCA. Furthermore, the military regime's persecution of the political opposition persisted. According to data from the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), 25,690 people had been arrested since the 2021 coup d'état, of which 19,891 were still in detention at the end of 2023. Another 4,275 political activists and human rights activists had died at the hands of the security forces.

Thailand (south)	
Start:	2004
Type:	Self-government, Identity Internal
Main parties:	Government, BRN and other separatist armed opposition groups
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓

Summary:
The conflict in the south of Thailand dates back to the beginning of the 20th century, when the then Kingdom of Siam and the British colonial power on the Malaysian peninsula decided to split the Sultanate of Pattani, leaving some territories under the sovereignty of what is currently Malaysia and others (the southern provinces of Songkhla, Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat) under Thai sovereignty. During the entire 20th century, there had been groups that had fought to resist the policies of political, cultural and religious homogenisation promoted by Bangkok or to demand the independence of these provinces, of Malay-Muslim majority. The conflict reached its moment of culmination in the 1960s and 70s and decreased in the following decades, thanks to the democratisation of the country. However, the coming into power of Thaksin Shinawatra in 2001, involved a drastic turn in the counterinsurgency policy and preceded a breakout of armed conflict from which the region has been suffering since 2004. The civil population, whether Buddhist or Muslim, is the main victim of the violence, which is not normally vindicated by any group.

In line with the clear and sustained decrease in violence in the southern part of the country, in 2023 there were substantially fewer episodes of violence, fatalities and people wounded due to the armed conflict compared to the previous year. According to the research centre

ACLED, over 40 people lost their lives over the course of the year. Some analysts think that the decrease is more related to the commitments made by the insurgents as part of the negotiating process with the government than to the weakening of the BRN, the main armed group in the three Muslim-majority southern provinces. There is no evidence that other armed organisations were responsible for episodes of violence, unlike in 2022, when the armed group PULO carried out some attacks. Despite the marked drop in the body count, the BRN demonstrated notable operational capacity at various times during the year, carrying out simultaneous and coordinated attacks, operations with dozens of insurgents and heavy weapons against police and military posts and attacks on major infrastructure such as railway services, electricity pylons and mobile telephone towers. In mid-April, for example, the BRN carried out coordinated attacks in six towns in the provinces of Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat. Later, on 11 May, it carried out simultaneous attacks in 30 municipalities in those provinces, and in October it orchestrated three coordinated bomb attacks and an assault on a military checkpoint. The other actions with the greatest impact during the year were an attack against a police convoy in which six people died in September and the detonation of an explosive device two days before the national elections were held in May. The months with the most intense fighting were April and May, shortly after the BRN told the government that it was temporarily pulling out of the negotiations until a new government emerged from the elections in May. The leader of the winning party in the elections, Move Forward, had declared that if he managed to form a government, the negotiating process would be led by civilians (the last three heads of the government panel have been military men), who would take human rights in the region more into consideration, promote a more inclusive and participatory peace process and prioritise the principle of coexistence in a multicultural society. However, Move Forward did not achieve enough of a parliamentary majority to form a government, so after an impasse lasting more than three months, the leader of the opposition party Pheu Thai (which finished second in the May elections) was inaugurated as prime minister after forming an 11-party coalition. On the same day that Srettha Thavisin was sworn in as prime minister, the former prime minister and founder and de facto leader of Pheu Thai, Thaksin Shinawatra, returned to Thailand after spending 15 years in exile to evade several pending criminal charges. Shinawatra was deposed in a coup in 2006 and it was under his administration that the conflict in the Muslim-majority southern provinces escalated to levels unprecedented in previous decades.

Although the violence declined substantially in 2023, in late August the government extended the state of emergency that has been in force in the south of the country since July 2005. It was the 73rd such extension. However, in October it announced that the state of emergency was no longer in force in three districts (one in each of the three provinces). In recent years, the state

of emergency has been lifted in ten districts. Along these lines, local and international human rights organisations such as Amnesty International have criticised the state of emergency for years since, among other issues, it grants extraordinary powers to state security forces, gives them immunity for their actions and allows people to be detained without charges for up to 30 days, arguing that it encourages impunity and abuse by the Thai Armed Forces and erodes the people's confidence in them and in the state as a whole. These organisations also call for the repeal of two other laws that govern the southern part of the country (the Internal Security Law and the Martial Law) and grant additional powers and competencies to the state security forces. Thus, in the middle of the year the government declared its intention to gradually draw down the number of troops and reduce the territorial coverage of the state of emergency until 2027. At the end of the year, the new government appointed a new negotiating panel and declared that its priorities would be the reduction of violence (and especially the end of hostilities during the month of Ramadan, an initiative that was carried out in 2022) and greater inclusivity and participation in the process. The Malaysian facilitator of the negotiating process revealed that the BRN had accepted the participation of other armed groups operating in the south in the peace talks, though without offering names or dates. Finally, in June, a group of students from Prince of Songkla University organised a referendum on the independence of the Patani region. The government declared it illegal, while the Thai Armed Forces considered it a threat to the territorial integrity of the country.

1.3.4. Europe

Eastern Europe

Russia - Ukraine	
Start:	2022
Type:	Government, Territory International
Main parties:	Russia, Wagner Group, Donbas militias, Ukraine
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=

Summary:
Under the leadership of Vladimir Putin Russia launched an invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, resulting in the military occupation of southern and eastern parts of the country, and also affected other areas and had serious impacts on human security, including mass forced displacement, extrajudicial killings, disappearances, sexual violence and food and energy insecurity. The invasion of Ukraine was preceded by previous cycles of conflict and failed dialogue: anti-government protests between late 2013 and early 2014 that led to the fall of the government

of President Viktor Yanukovych, Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and war in eastern Ukraine since April 2014 between Russian-backed local militias and the Ukrainian Army. In contravention of international law, Russia's invasion and war targeted Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The antagonism between the US, the EU and NATO on one side and Russia on the other, as well as a failed security architecture in Europe, also influenced the context of the conflict and the prospects for resolution. Between late February and April 2022, Russia and Ukraine held political-military negotiations, which were unsuccessful. The invasion had multidimensional global repercussions, including food insecurity for countries in the MENA region and Africa, a strained international order and greater militarisation in Europe.

The war between Russia and Ukraine, caused by the 2022 Russian invasion of the neighbouring country, produced high levels of fatalities and serious impacts on human and environmental security in 2023, while there were no large-scale changes along the military front lines. Ukraine and Russia did not provide official military body counts. According to OHCHR data, at least 1,931 civilians died and another 6,508 were wounded in 2023 (10,191 dead and 19,139 wounded since the invasion began in 2022, 6% of them minors). The OHCHR also indicated that the real numbers of civilian victims should be considerably higher. **Explosive weapons with a wide blast area were responsible for 84% of the civilian fatalities** and 95% of the civilian injuries. Citing US officials as their source, media reports in August provided a death toll of half a million troops killed or wounded between both sides since 2022.[111] According to the ACLED database, in 2023 there were at least 30,908 fatalities (33,608 in 2022) and 47,784 incidents of battles, violence against civilians, explosions and remote violence (37,909 in 2022). OCHA's 2023 humanitarian assessment included 3.7 million internally displaced people (based on data until September 2023), 14.6 million people in need of humanitarian assistance by 2024, 719,000 people without access to safe or adequate accommodation, 13% of educational facilities destroyed or damaged in 2023 and 256 attacks on health facilities in 2023, in addition to other impacts.[112] Moreover, 6 million Ukrainians were refugees in Europe and another 475,600 were refugees outside Europe, according to UNHCR data from early 2024.

Armed hostilities continued around the military front lines. One of the areas most affected by violence in the first few months of the year was around Bakhmut (Donetsk region). In January, Russia took Soledar (north of Bakhmut). **In May, after 10 months of clashes, Russia announced that it had conquered Bakhmut.** Ukraine had ordered its forces to resist Russia there until the end. Bakhmut was largely destroyed and, according to the ICRC, only about 10,000 inhabitants remained of

111. Various authors, "Troop Deaths and Injuries in Ukraine War Near 500,000, U.S. Officials Say", *The New York Times*, 18 August 2023.
112. OCHA, *Ukraine: Humanitarian Situation Snapshot (December 2023)*, *OCHA*, 5 February 2024.

the 70,000 that had been there before the war. Even without official death tolls, analysts estimated that several tens of thousands of soldiers had died between both sides in Bakhmut. The leader of the Wagner Group admitted 20,000 casualties of its own.

In June, Ukraine launched a military counteroffensive in the south and east, which did not result in significant territorial gains in the face of Russia's extensive defensive fortifications and minefields. At the start of the Ukrainian counteroffensive, on 6 June, an explosion occurred at the Kakhovka Dam (in Kherson Oblast in southern Ukraine, occupied by Russia) that destroyed it and caused an ecological and humanitarian catastrophe. The blast caused the flooding of large areas, contaminated water with chemicals, damaged farm land, harmed fauna and flora, forced people to evacuate, destroyed infrastructure and homes and displaced land mines. The Kakhovka Reservoir, one of the largest in Europe and a source of drinking water for 700,000 people, started to drain, leaving many people without access to water. It also created additional risks at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant. Russia and Ukraine traded blame for the blast. Journalists cited evidence that Russia was behind it.[113] The government of Ukraine, the UN and various NGOs were involved in the humanitarian response in areas under Ukrainian control. Russia denied humanitarian actors access to flood-affected areas under occupation.

The invasion and war in Ukraine caused serious impacts in its second year and 14.6 million people in Ukraine were expected to require humanitarian assistance in 2014

Alongside the Ukrainian military counteroffensive, Russia continued to press the attack. **In the final months of the year, Russia intensified its attacks in the east** around the city of Avdiivka (Donetsk Oblast), in territory east of Kupiansk (Kharkiv Oblast) and in areas around Bakhmut. Russia seized the city of Marinka (Donetsk Oblast) in December. In November, Ukraine announced that it had established several landing points on the left bank of the Dnieper River, all areas occupied by Russia. **Throughout the year, Russia bombed various areas in Ukraine, killing and wounding many civilians and troops and damaging civil and other types of infrastructure**. These Russian bombings included an attack in January against a residential building in Dnipro that killed 45 civilians (six of them minors) and wounded 79; a missile attack on 27 June on a busy restaurant in Kramatorsk (Donetsk) that killed 11 civilians, including three minors, and wounded 61, including Ukrainian writer Victoria Amelina; another missile attack on 19 August, a religious holiday, in the northern town of Chernihiv, which hit a central square,

Ukraine's military counteroffensive did not result in significant territorial gains in 2023, while the war continued to cause serious impacts

university and theatre, killing seven people, including a minor, and wounding 110 (12 minors); and a third missile attack on 5 October against a café in Groza, in Kharkiv, that killed 59 people, making it one of the most serious massacres. In November and December, Russia carried out several waves of drone and missile attacks against the Ukrainian capital and various cities, killing and wounding civilians and damaging infrastructure. Forty civilians were killed and over 130 were wounded in large-scale airstrikes in several cities on 29 December. Fresh attacks on 30 and 31 December that mainly struck the city of Kharkiv (east) and towns on the front lines killed around 10 and wounded approximately 40.

In July, Moscow ended its participation in the agreement known as the Black Sea Grain Initiative, which had been reached in 2022 and renewed several times, including in March and May 2023.[114] After pulling out of the agreement, Russia conducted air strikes against port and grain storage infrastructure on the Black Sea coast, including in Odessa, and along the Danube River. Meanwhile, **Ukraine carried out attacks against the Russian Black Sea military fleet and related infrastructure in Crimea, which intensified in the second half of the year, and forced most of the Russian fleet to withdraw**. Ukraine attacked Russia's Black Sea Fleet headquarters in Sevastopol on 22 September. With the withdrawal of most of the Russian fleet completed, Ukraine partially resumed exporting grain by sea. However, Russia attacked a civilian ship in the port of Odessa with a missile in November.

Ukraine also stepped up its attacks on Russian territory in 2023. Ukraine did not explicitly claim responsibility for these attacks. According to ACLED data, there were 1,172 drone strikes in Russian territory between January and December. The number of intercepted drones also rose. There were also attacks against recruitment offices and against railway infrastructure. On 30 December, air strikes against Belgorod, a Russian town near the border with Ukraine, killed 21 people, including three minors, and injured 110. According to Reuters, the air strikes allegedly included cluster bombs. These attacks were preceded by around 30 drone attacks against towns in the oblasts of Moscow, Bryansk, Oryol and Kursk, which were intercepted, according to the Russian authorities.

In other developments during the year, **the Wagner Group, led by Yevgeny Prigozhin, staged a failed armed uprising in Russia on 23 and 24 June**. The mutiny

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113. Various authors, "Why the Evidence Suggests Russia Blew Up the Kakhovka Dam", *The New York Times*, 16 June 2023.
114. See the summary on Russia-Ukraine in chapter 5 (Peace negotiations in Europe) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

had been preceded by months of tension between Prigozhin and the Russian military authorities. Wagner Group combatants took the city of Rostov-on-Don and advanced through several regions towards the Russian capital. Described as treason by Putin, the uprising was dismantled and Prigozhin fled for Belarus. He died in August when the plane he was travelling in crashed, killing 10 people. Many analysts blamed Prigozhin's death on the Russian government.

During the year, **the warring parties received foreign military support and intensified their internal production of weapons.** According to data from the Kiel Institute in late October 2023, the United States was Ukraine's main supplier of weapons, military equipment and financial support linked to military objectives (46.3 billion dollars committed), followed by Germany (18.1 billion) and the United Kingdom (6.9 billion). In 2023, many Western countries agreed to provide combat tanks, including Leopard 2 tanks, and the United States said it would send M1 Abrams. In July, Washington approved to send cluster bombs to Ukraine and did so that same month. Cluster bombs are banned by the Convention on Cluster Munitions, which has been ratified by 111 countries and has been in force since 2010. The United States, Ukraine and Russia have not signed the convention. NGOs such as Amnesty International criticised this decision due to the indiscriminate and long-lasting impacts of cluster bombs on the civilian population. Washington also authorised the Netherlands and Denmark to ship US-made F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine as long as the pilots were trained beforehand, which scheduled the F-16s' delivery for 2024. Russia intensified its military ties with Iran and North Korea. The US accused both countries of providing weapons to Russia. The escalation in arms supplies contrasted with international actors' limited initiatives to seek negotiated solutions to the conflict, most of which came from non-Western actors, while Russia and Ukraine continued to reject opening negotiations, as gulfs remained between their conditions and demands.

South-east Europe

Türkiye (south-east)	
Start:	1984
Type:	Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, PKK, TAK, ISIS
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓

Summary:
The PKK, created in 1978 as a political party of a Marxist-Leninist nature and led by Abdullah Öcalan, announced

in 1984, an armed offensive against the government, undertaking a campaign of military rebellion to reclaim the independence of Kurdistan, which was heavily responded to by the government in defence of territorial integrity. The war that was unleashed between the PKK and the government particularly affected the Kurdish civil population in the south-east of Türkiye, caught in the crossfire and the victims of the persecutions and campaigns of forced evacuations carried out by the government. In 1999, the conflict took a turn, with the arrest of Öcalan and the later communication by the PKK of giving up the armed fight and the transformation of their objectives, leaving behind their demand for independence to centre on claiming the recognition of the Kurdish identity within Türkiye. Since then, the conflict has shifted between periods of ceasefire (mainly between 2000 and 2004) and violence, coexisting alongside democratisation measures and attempts at dialogue (Democratization Initiative in 2008, Oslo Dialogue in 2009-2011 and the Imrali process in 2013-2015). In 2015 the war was restarted. The armed conflict has caused around 40,000 fatalities since the 80s. The war in Syria once again laid bare the regional dimension of the Kurdish issue and the cross-border scope of the PKK issue, whose Syrian branch took control of the predominantly Kurdish areas in the country.

The armed conflict between Türkiye and the PKK remained active in southeastern Türkiye ad mainly in northern Iraq,[115] though it was significantly less bloody. The International Crisis Group estimated 200 deaths related to the armed conflict in Türkiye and northern Iraq in 2023 (compared to 434 in 2022 and 420 in 2021), 75% of which were members of the PKK. ACLED released a death toll of 137 inside Türkiye. The PKK admitted that it had suffered 179 casualties, 75 in Türkiye and 104 in northern Iraq, and estimated that it had killed 912 members of the security forces and wounded 128. Türkiye estimated that it had "neutralised" (killed or detained) 2,000 combatants in Türkiye, Iraq and Syria. Türkiye continued to view the PKK and the Kurdish forces of Syria as the same actor. Historically, the warring parties have tended to overstate the casualties they have allegedly caused to each other. **In February, the PKK announced a unilateral cessation of hostilities in Türkiye due to the serious humanitarian situation caused by the 7.8 magnitude earthquake** that rocked southern Türkiye and northern Syria that month, followed by thousands of aftershocks and another 7.5 earthquake.[116] The effects of the earthquake in Türkiye were devastating, killing 44,000 people and injuring around 110,000, making 2.7 million homeless, collapsing or seriously damaging 160,000 buildings and causing a great collective trauma. Analysts discussed the limitations of the institutional response and focused on the 2018 government amnesty that legalised 7.4 million buildings with substandard construction and on shortcomings in implementing regulations.[117] After a brief pause in the first few days after the earthquake, the Turkish government maintained its operations against the PKK despite the latter's ceasefire. Turkish security

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115. See the summary on Iraq in this chapter.
116. See the summary on Syria in this chapter.
117. Gürsoy, Yaprak, "The earthquake might upend more than Turkey's elections", *Chatham House*, 31 March 2023; Horton, Jake and William Armstrong, "Turkey earthquake: Why did so many buildings collapse?", *BBC*, 9 February 2023.

forces pursued the PKK throughout the year in provinces in southeastern Türkiye and primarily in northern Iraq, initially at low levels, though these later intensified. According to ACLED, February was the month with the lowest level of Turkish air strikes since April 2021. Türkiye increased its attacks starting in March. In April, ACLED indicated a 20% increase in Turkish air strikes against the PKK in northern Iraq. **The PKK extended its ceasefire until after the parliamentary and presidential elections in May, but ended its unilateral truce on 13 June**, citing Türkiye's continued military operations against the group.

After the truce ended, armed hostilities increased. Türkiye claimed to have killed or captured several senior PKK officials during the year. The hostilities worsened in August, when two days of fighting in the Zap region in northern Iraq caused the death of six Turkish soldiers, according to Ankara, and 32 soldiers, according to the PKK. This was followed by air strikes by the Turkish Army. Shortly thereafter, between 22 and 24 August, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan travelled to the capital of Iraq, Baghdad, and to the capital of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq, Erbil, and held meetings with various authorities. In Erbil, he met with KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani and others. According to Hakan, both Baghdad and Erbil were committed to eliminating the PKK from Iraqi soil. In September, Kurdish forces *(peshmerga)* linked to the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), the KRG's ruling party and a trading partner of Türkiye, attacked PKK positions in the governorates of Erbil and Dohuk. This was a rare direct confrontation, according to ACLED. In October, a suicide bomb attack outside the entrance to the headquarters of the Ministry of the Interior's General Directorate of Security in the Turkish capital, Ankara, wounded two police officers. A second attacker was killed by the police. The PKK claimed responsibility for the attack, saying it was a warning to the Turkish government about its military operations against it in Iraq and Syria. Türkiye stepped up air strikes in northern Iraq and Syria in retaliation for the attack in Ankara. In the final months of the year, fresh fighting and attacks took place in northern Iraq between the Turkish Army and the PKK. According to the Turkish government, 26 Kurdish fighters were killed in attacks in northern Iraq and Syria in December in response to the deaths of 12 Turkish soldiers in northern Iraq that month.

The re-election of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in the second round of the presidential election in May and the victory of his Justice and Development Party in the parliamentary elections that same month ensured continuity in the government's approach to the armed conflict with the PKK on the basis of securitization and "fighting against terrorism" in Türkiye and in the region (Iraq and Syria), while Türkiye strengthened relations with Damascus and the KRG in 2023.[118] There were more arrests of Kurdish civilians in Türkiye in 2023, including political opponents, journalists and activists.

118. See the summaries on Syria and Iraq in this chapter.

On 25 April alone, 110 people were arrested in 21 provinces. Human rights organisations denounced more serious violations of rights by the authorities once again this year. Dynamics of racism and violence against the Syrian refugee population continued, made worse in the aftermath of the earthquake. There were also incidents of political violence, as 2023 was an election year. Dozens of alleged ISIS members were also arrested during the year.

1.3.5. Middle East

Mashreq

Egypt (Sinai)	
Start:	2014
Type:	System Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (ABM) or Sinai Province (branch of ISIS), pro-government militia Union of Sinai Tribes (UST)
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓

Summary:
The Sinai Peninsula has become a growing source of instability. Since the ouster of Hosni Mubarak in 2011, the area has reported increasing insurgent activity that initially directed its attacks against Israeli interests. This trend raised many questions about maintaining security commitments between Egypt and Israel after the signing of the Camp David Accords in 1979, which led to the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the peninsula. However, alongside the bumpy evolution of the Egyptian transition, jihadist groups based in the Sinai have shifted the focus of their actions to the Egyptian security forces, especially after the coup d'état against the Islamist government of Mohamed Mursi (2013). The armed groups, especially Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (ABM), have gradually demonstrated their ability to act beyond the peninsula, displayed the use of more sophisticated weapons and broadened their targets to attack tourists as well. ABM's decision to pledge loyalty to the organisation Islamic State (ISIS) in late 2014 marked a new turning point in the evolution of the conflict. Its complexity is determined by the influence of multiple factors, including the historical political and economic marginalisation that has stoked the grievances of the Bedouins, the majority population in the Sinai; the dynamics of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; and regional turmoil, which has facilitated the movement of weapons and fighters to the area. In 2023, the crisis in Gaza added uncertainty and challenges to the situation in Sinai.

The armed conflict in the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt was significantly less bloody in 2023. Despite the usual difficulties in obtaining information on the dynamics in the region, **the available data point to a reduction in violent incidents** that in recent years have pitted members of a branch of the armed group Islamic State (ISIS) that calls itself Sinai Province (Wilayat Sinai) against the Egyptian Army supported by tribal militias.

There was hardly any information about clashes or armed attacks, except for one incident at police facilities near Arish that resulted in the death of four people and another in September that killed seven people in North Sinai Governorate, though it was unclear whether it was an attack or an accident. According to ACLED, a dozen people died in Egypt in events linked to clashes or bomb attacks during 2023. This is a significant decrease compared to previous years, when various violent episodes with several dozen fatalities had been reported in Sinai: in 2022, it was estimated that 272 people had died in acts of armed violence and in 2021 the death toll had been between 150 and 220. Early in the year, the Egyptian prime minister and chief of the General Staff visited the North Sinai area and stressed that the security situation was stable and that state institutions were fully functioning. **In January, Egyptian President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi said that Egypt "had largely succeeded in eliminating terrorism in Sinai".** In the following months, it emerged that ISIS militants had retreated to a mountainous area in central Sinai.

Alongside these developments, **local and international human rights organisations continued to complain about abuses committed by the Egyptian authorities during their military campaign in Sinai**. For example, Human Rights Watch (HRW) criticised the Egyptian security forces for the **arbitrary arrest of women and girls related to alleged members of ISIS**.[119] After documenting over 20 cases that occurred between 2017 and 2022, HRW warned that more than half the women and girls had been incommunicado for periods of between two weeks and six months and that some of them had been beaten and subjected to electroshocks by members of the National Security Agency. The arrests were intended to obtain information about their relatives and/or pressure the alleged suspects to surrender. HRW claims that some of these women had been victims of the ISIS branch, as they had been raped or forced to marry, and that they had been arrested after escaping and seeking help from the authorities. Sinai Foundation for Human Rights also reported that **tribal militias collaborating with the Egyptian Army in the campaign against ISIS had recruited minors**, even as young as 16, for logistical and combat activities, some of whom had died or been injured.[120] Additionally, several Egyptian human rights organisations condemned **the use of force by the security forces against peaceful protests staged by hundreds of people forcibly displaced by the anti-ISIS campaign** in northeastern Sinai since 2013, particularly around Rafah and Sheikh Zuwaid.[121] The demonstrators demanded the right to return to their homes and blasted the failure of

Even though the armed conflict in the Sinai Peninsula was significantly less bloody, the repercussions of the crisis in Gaza cast uncertainty on the future of the region

the authorities, who had pledged to allow these people to return before 20 October 2023. The human rights organisations recalled that under the pretext of the anti-terrorist campaign, the Egyptian government had violated the human rights of the people in the area on multiple occasions, forcibly displacing nearly 150,000 residents of North Sinai, destroying thousands of homes and degrading thousands of hectares of agricultural land. The organisations also repeated that the tribal militias' cooperation with the Egyptian authorities to eradicate ISIS from the area reflected in part the latter's promises regarding the return of the displaced population. The protests in Sinai intensified in the last quarter of the year amid fears of Israel's plans to forcibly displace the Palestinian population there from Gaza. **The crisis in Gaza also created uncertainty about the future of the Sinai Peninsula**. According to reports, in December Cairo rejected a request from Benjamin Netanyahu's government to provide military access to the Philadelphi/Salaheddin corridor. Known by both names, the corridor is a 14-kilometre strip of land between Gaza and Egypt that is demilitarised in accordance with the peace agreement signed between Israel and Egypt in 1979. The Israeli government claims that Hamas uses this area to bring weapons into the Gaza Strip, though the Egyptian authorities deny the accusation. **Tensions around this corridor threatened to deteriorate relations between Israel and Egypt, while analysts warned of the possible remilitarisation of the Sinai Peninsula**. In fact, Egypt had already gradually remilitarised it in recent years as part of its anti-ISIS campaign, with Israel's secret consent. Given the escalation of violence since October, Cairo became involved in initiatives to try to mediate between Hamas and Israel, motivated to avoid the repercussions of the Gaza crisis on its soil, and particularly the possible entry of Palestinian refugees into Sinai and the reactivation of armed groups.[122]

Iraq	
Start:	2003
Type:	System, Government, Identity, Resources Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, Iraqi military and security forces, Kurdish forces (peshmerga), Shia militias Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) and Saraya Salam, Sunni militias, ISIS, international anti-ISIS coalition led by USA, USA, Iran, Türkiye
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↓

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119. Human Rights Watch, *Egypt: Women Abused Over Alleged ISIS Ties*, 17 May 2023.
120. Sinai Foundation for Human Rights, *I Was Afraid…I Was Only 17*, 8 August 2023.
121. Sinai Foundation for human Rights, *Egypt: Authorities must stop security violence against civilians in northeastern Sinai, and allow the displaced to return to their lands*, 26 October 2023.
122. See the summary on Israel-Palestine in the chapter 6 (Peace negotiations in the Middle East) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

Summary:

The invasion of Iraq by the international coalition led by the USA in March 2003 (using the alleged presence of weapons of mass destruction as an argument and with the desire to overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein due to his alleged link to the attacks of the 11th September 2001 in the USA) started an armed conflict in which numerous actors progressively became involved: international troops, the Iraqi armed forces, militias and rebel groups and Al Qaeda, among others. The new division of power between Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish groups within the institutional setting set up after the overthrow of Hussein led to discontent among numerous sectors. The violence has increased, with the armed opposition against the international presence in the country superimposing the internal fight for the control of power with a marked sectarian component since February 2006, mainly between Shiites and Sunnis. Following the withdrawal of the US forces in late 2011, the dynamics of violence have persisted, with a high impact on the civilian population. The armed conflict worsened in 2014 as a result of the rise of the armed group Islamic State (ISIS) and the Iraqi government's military response, backed by a new international coalition led by the United States. The levels of violence have been reduced since 2018, after the announcement of defeat of ISIS, although the group continues to operate with actions of lower intensity. The country has also been affected by the growing dispute between Washington and Tehran and its competition to influence Iraqi affairs and, since late 2023, by the repercussions of the crisis in Gaza across the entire region.

In 2023, Iraq continued to be the scene of a high-intensity armed conflict involving many different actors with a persistent impact on civilians, though it was relatively less bloody than in 2022 and in periods of more intense hostilities (2003-2008 and 2014-2017). According to data from ACLED, 1,334 deaths were reported in various acts of violence and incidents associated with the armed conflict in Iraq last year, well below the 4,427 counted the year before.[123] Data from Iraq Body Count (IBC) on civilian casualties point to a similar trend: 537 in 2023 compared to 740 in 2022.[124] The UN mission in the country, UNAMI, also reported the deaths of dozens of civilians in 2023 as a result of unexploded ordnance, explosive devices, armed attacks, firefights, air strikes and other incidents. By the end of the year, 4.9 million people displaced by violence had returned to their homes, but another 1.12 million remained displaced within the country in formal and informal settlements. It was also estimated that over 100,000 people had been displaced due to climate-related issues since 2016.

The dynamics of violence in the country continued to involve many local, regional and international actors. The armed group ISIS remained active and led attacks mainly in the governorates of Anbar, Bagdad, Diyala,

Starting in the last quarter, as a result of the crisis in Gaza, attacks against US interests in Iraq and US attacks against pro-Iranian militias in the country intensified

Kirkuk, Nineveh and Salah al-Din. Iraqi security forces also continued their operations against the organisation. According to UNAMI, 178 ISIS attacks were reported in the first half of the year, compared to 526 in 2022. The is the lowest figure since the Iraqi authorities declared victory against ISIS in 2017 and is interpreted as a sign of the decline of the group's activity in the country. Through its propaganda media, ISIS claimed responsibility for 141 attacks in Iraq (until November) compared to 401 in 2022 (in the same period), while carrying out a greater proportion of its attacks in Africa. However, according to estimates by UN experts released in the middle of the year, **ISIS still has between 5,000 and 7,000 fighters in Syria and Iraq**. At the same time, Türkiye continued its armed ground and air incursions into northern Iraq as part of its armed conflict with the PKK and related groups, mainly in the governorates of Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah. Ankara framed these actions as the exercise of its "right to self-defence", in contrast to Baghdad, which formally considers them violations of Iraqi sovereignty. Among other events, Türkiye decreed the closure of airspace to or from Sulaymaniyah after reporting an intensification of PKK activities in the area and launching an attack against the head of the Syrian Kurdish forces (YPG).[125] Throughout the year, there were also intra-Kurdish tensions (between the KPD and PUK), disputes and clashes between Shia factions (between the followers of the cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and members of the Iranian-backed Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), among other episodes) and tribal clashes, mainly in the southern part of the country. In 2023, Iran also pressured Iraq to force the withdrawal of several Iranian Kurdish opposition groups from the border area.

During the last quarter, the situation in the country was also affected by the Gaza crisis. Since October, **threats and attacks by many different Iraqi armed actors against US personnel, interests and facilities in Iraq have intensified, in retaliation for its political and military support for Israel**. Positions of the international anti-ISIS military coalition led by Washington were also hit. Most of the actions were claimed by the self-proclaimed Islamic Resistance in Iraq, which brings together several pro-Iranian groups. Washington also stepped up its attacks in the country, mainly against groups such as Kata'ib Hizbullah, Harakat Hezbollah and the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, killing several members of them. At the end of the year, various Iraqi actors criticised the US military attacks in the country and asked why Washington maintains a military presence in Iraq (of around 2,500 troops). The year 2023 marked the 20th anniversary of the US-led invasion of Iraq,

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123. ACLED Dashboard [Viewed on 3 February 2024].
124. Iraq Body Count [Viewed on 3 February 2024].
125. See the summary on Türkiye (south-east) and on Syria in this chapter.

prompting analysts to assess the situation in the country and warn about the persistent dynamics of violence and the fragile and unstable economic situation it faces. In mid-2023, there were a series of protests in Baghdad and other cities in the country in reaction to the burning of copies of the Quran in Europe. These incidents led to a diplomatic crisis between Iraq and Sweden. In some demonstrations in Iraq, LGTBIQ+ flags were burned.[126]

Israel – Hezbollah[127]	
Start:	2023
Type:	System, Resources, Territory International
Main parties:	Israel, Hezbollah
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↑

Summary:

In the background of this conflict is the Palestinian-Israeli issue and its consequences across the region. The thousands of Palestinian refugees who settled in Lebanon after 1948, together with the leadership of the PLO in 1979, prompted Israel's continuous attacks in the southern part of the country. Israeli forces invaded southern Lebanon in 1978 and again in 1982, claiming to expel Palestinian militias that were using the area to launch attacks on Israel. The Shia political and armed group Hezbollah was created in Lebanon in the early 1980s, during the Lebanese Civil War, for the stated purpose of opposing Israel, rejecting the Western presence in the Middle East and liberating Palestine. Hezbollah's activities led to periodic clashes that culminated in the large-scale Israeli offensive against Lebanon in July 2006. Considered one of the most powerful non-state armed actors in the region, Hezbollah relies on Iran as its main source of external support. In recent years, it has been involved in combat operations in Syria and Iraq and has provided military assistance to other armed groups with similar agendas in the region. In 2023, the crisis in Gaza and the resulting escalation of tensions throughout the Middle East led to a new phase of the armed conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. Since 1978, a UN mission, UNSMIL, has been deployed on the de facto border area between Lebanon and Israel, with an evolving mandate that includes supervising the withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon (2000) and the cessation of hostilities (after the 2006 war).

The rise of tensions throughout the Middle East as a result of the crisis in Gaza opened an especially important front on the de facto border area between Israel and Lebanon. **The increase in the magnitude, frequency and scope of the hostilities between Israeli forces and Hezbollah and the repercussions of the violence led the situation to be classified as an armed conflict by the end of 2023.** The tension between Israel and the Shia party and militia had already led to hostile and bellicose rhetoric and exchanges of threats since the beginning of the year. One of the main elements of friction was Jerusalem and particularly the Israeli authorities' actions at the Temple Mount, which were rejected by Hezbollah and other Arab and Muslim actors. In January, in response to the controversial visit to the area by the new far-right Israeli Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah warned that violations of the status quo at the Temple Mount could encourage regional chaos. In April, the Israeli police's crackdown on Palestinians at the Al-Aqsa Mosque[128] led to the launch of more than 30 rockets from southern Lebanon to northern Israel in what was considered the largest cross-border strike since the 2006 war. Israel blamed the attack on Hamas and conducted air strikes against suspected Hezbollah facilities in Lebanon. In the months that followed, various armed exchanges were reported in the disputed border areas, including Shebaa Farms and Ghajar. These types of incidents had increased since mid-2022. In June, Hezbollah claimed to have shot down an Israeli drone that had entered Lebanese airspace in the Zibqin area (south).

The situation deteriorated starting in October. **Since the Hamas attacks and the start of the Israeli military campaign in Gaza, there have been warnings of repercussions on the de facto border area between Israel and Lebanon and of intensification of the frequency and scope of exchanges of fire along the Blue Line**.[129] Israeli forces and Hezbollah fighters participated in these events. Members of Palestinian groups such as Hamas' Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades and Islamic Jihad were also sporadically involved and claimed to have attempted to infiltrate from Lebanon. Various analysts indicated that despite the rise in hostilities, the actions of Israel, Iran and groups close to Iran, including Hezbollah, seemed to indicate that neither side wanted to escalate the situation to a greater and direct regional confrontation. Hezbollah tried to demonstrate its solidarity with the Palestinian people, but it was also careful not to cross a threshold that could drag Lebanon into a new war with Israel at a particularly critical moment for the country, as it is in the grips of a severe political and economic crisis. Despite this approach, by the end of October the almost daily armed exchanges between Hezbollah and Israeli forces had already killed more than 50 people and caused significant displacements of the population. **In his first public address since the events of October, in November, Nasrallah expressed support for Hamas and denounced Israel's actions in Gaza and the complicity of the United States**, but he avoided committing Hezbollah

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126. See chapter 3 (Gender, peace and security).
127. This armed conflict involves and impacts other regional actors in different ways. In previous editions of the report, the dynamics of this dispute were analysed in the chapter on Socio-political crises under the title "Israel – Syria – Lebanon" and analyses in recent years have highlighted Iran's growing involvement in the conflict.
128. See the summary on Israel-Palestine in this chapter.
129. The Blue Line is the line that marks the zone from which Israeli forces withdrew from southern Lebanon in 2000. Although it is not an international border, in practice it operates as a boundary between Lebanon and Israel.

to further involvement in the conflict. After 7 October, Washington deployed two aircraft carriers to the eastern Mediterranean and increased its military presence in the region, which it explained was meant "to deter any country or group that wanted to take advantage of the instability and confusion" in the area, in an apparent allusion to Iran and Hezbollah. In this context, the temporary truce agreement between the government of Israel and Hamas mediated by Qatar in late November was also respected for all practical purposes in the border area between Israel and Lebanon. However, the collapse of the truce and the resumption of hostilities led to a significant escalation of violence in early December.

At the end of the year, the death toll in the conflict had risen to at least 165 people: 134 Hezbollah fighters, a Lebanese soldier and around 20 Lebanese civilians, in addition to nine Israeli soldiers and one Israeli civilian. The violence and fragile security situation in the border area had also **forcibly displaced around 100,000 Israelis, evacuated by the authorities in October for an indefinite period, and another 50,000 Lebanese residents in southern Lebanon**. During the last quarter, **acts of violence in Syria involving Israel, pro-Iranian militias and Hezbollah also increased**.[130] Lebanese militiamen also launched attacks from Syria against Israel, while Israeli air strikes reportedly caused the death of more than 15 Hezbollah members in Damascus, Homs and Quneitra. By the end of the year, across the region there was generally greater volatility and less containment by different armed actors, which were more inclined to use force. The assassination of Hamas' second-in-command in Beirut and of two other Hezbollah leaders in southern Lebanon in separate Israeli attacks in the first week of January 2024 anticipated a possible escalation of violence in the coming year. The UN mission in Lebanon (UNIFIL) remained operational in 2023 and was also affected by the escalation of violence and exchanges of fire starting in October. For example, a shell hit its command centre in Naqoura and two members of the mission were wounded in fighting that affected UNIFIL positions. The UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon held meetings with senior Lebanese officials and diplomatic representatives in which she stressed the need to ease tensions and prevent the country from getting dragged into a larger conflict, considering the fragility of the political and economic situation in the country, as the president's term had expired in October 2022 and the government was still provisional. Another factor to consider in this dynamic are the tensions between Palestinian groups based in Lebanon. During 2023, several clashes between armed Fatah factions and Palestinian Islamist groups in the Sidon refugee camp between July and September claimed at least 30 lives and wounded hundreds of people.

The increase in the magnitude, frequency and scope of the hostilities between Israeli forces and Hezbollah led the situation to be classified as an armed conflict at the end of 2023

Following the intervention of the speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, a ceasefire agreement was reached in mid-September that led to the deployment of a joint force inside the camp and of the Lebanese Armed Forces on its perimeter.

Israel – Palestine	
Start:	2000
Type:	Self-government, Identity, Territory International
Main parties:	Israeli government, settler militias, PA, Fatah (Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades), Hamas (Ezzedin al-Qassam Brigades), Islamic Jihad, FPLP, FDLP, Popular Resistance Committees, Salafists groups, brigades of Jenin, Nablus and Tubas, Lion's Den
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑

Summary:
The conflict between Israel and the various Palestinian actors started up again in 2000 with the outbreak of the Second Intifada, favoured by the failure of the peace process promoted at the beginning of the 1990s (the Oslo Accords, 1993-1994). The Palestinian-Israeli conflict started in 1947 when the United Nations Security Council Resolution 181 divided Palestinian territory under British mandate into two states and soon after proclaimed the state of Israel (1948), without the state of Palestine having been able to materialise itself since then. After the 1948-49 war, Israel annexed West Jerusalem and Egypt and Jordan took over control of Gaza and the West Bank, respectively. In 1967, Israel occupied East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza after winning the "Six-Day War" against the Arab countries. It was not until the Oslo Accords that the autonomy of the Palestinian territory would be formally recognised, although its introduction was to be impeded by the military occupation and the control of the territory imposed by Israel.

Violence intensified exponentially starting in the last quarter of 2023, reaching levels unprecedented in decades, with wide-ranging effects not only for the Palestinian-Israeli issue, but throughout the Middle East. The situation had already shown signs of deterioration in the first few months of the year, with multiplying incidents and acts of violence, an increase in Israeli incursions into the West Bank and provocative rhetoric and actions by members of the Israeli cabinet at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, among other events. In May, shootouts between Israeli forces and Islamic Jihad in Gaza resulted in the deaths of 33 Palestinians and one Israeli. **In the middle of the year, the UN warned that Palestinian deaths in various acts of violence in the West Bank already exceeded all those reported in 2022 and made for the highest**

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130. See the summary on Syria in this chapter.

body count since 2005. It also warned that attacks by Israeli settlers had increased by 40% in the first half of the year, reaching the worst level since such data began to be collected in 2006. In this context, **on 7 October, an unprecedented attack by Hamas and Islamic Jihad against several Israeli towns and a music festival in areas adjacent to Gaza claimed around 1,200 lives, including Israelis and foreigners, while nearly 200 people were taken hostage**. Benjamin Netanyahu's government declared itself in a "state of war" and launched a military operation with the stated goal of eliminating Hamas. The Israeli authorities imposed a total siege against Gaza, blocking access to all types of supplies and further tightening the blockade to which they had already subjected it since 2007. At the same time, Israel began an incessant aerial bombardment campaign. Starting in late October, it also launched a ground offensive from northern to southern Gaza, with an intensity of fire and destructive power of extraordinary magnitude. **By the end of the year, more than 25,000 Palestinians had died in the Gaza Strip as a result of the Israeli operations and another 8,000 people were estimated to be buried under the rubble**, while analysts warned that the average mortality rate there was higher than that of any other armed conflict in the world in the 21st century. According to estimates based on Israeli sources, some 175 soldiers had died in fighting with Hamas and other militias since the beginning of the ground operation. Israeli forces claimed to have killed around 8,000 members of the Palestinian group and detained thousands more.

The Israeli offensive against the Gaza Strip was increasingly denounced as collective punishment due to its devastating impact on its entire population: 70% of the fatal victims of the Israeli offensive were Palestinian women and minors, reversing the trend observed in the last 15 years in which most (67%) civilian casualties were men.[131] Nearly 10,000 Palestinian girls and boys had died in the attacks, more than all minors who have died in armed conflicts in the world since 2019. The number of the wounded exceeded 60,000, some of them as a result of the use of weapons prohibited in populated areas, such as white phosphorus, as reported by HRW. Israel's systematic attacks against hospitals in the Gaza Strip (less than half were operational by the end of 2023) and the lack of medicine due to the blockade, including anaesthetics and antibiotics, had a direct impact on the possibilities of caring for victims, sick people and pregnant women.[132] By the end of the

The Israeli offensive against the Gaza Strip was denounced as collective punishment against its population and South Africa brought a case against Israel at the ICJ for violating the Genocide Convention

year, Israeli bombing had totally or partially destroyed 60% of Gaza's homes and forcibly displaced 75% of the population (1.7 million out of 2.3 million). **The Palestinian population was forced to move several times, first from north to south and then to the west, attacked on routes identified as "safe" by Israel and forced to concentrate in increasingly smaller areas**. By the end of 2023, nearly half the population of Gaza was concentrated in Rafah, on the border with Egypt, in extremely precarious conditions, suffering from a serious lack of hygiene, food, fuel and medicine, and in winter, which further encouraged the proliferation of diseases. At the end of the year, agencies and NGOs warned that practically the entire Gazan population was at risk of famine. The Israeli attacks also killed more than 100 journalists and many humanitarian workers in Gaza, including over 100 UNRWA workers. The situation in the West Bank worsened significantly, with an intensification of Israeli attacks, including air strikes; imposed restrictions on movement; many arrests, doubling the number of Palestinians detained by Israel; an escalation in attacks by settlers; the forced displacement of more than 2,000 people, half of them minors; and the death of another 200 people, raising the body count due to violence in the West Bank to 551 in 2023. Given these events, **some warned that war crimes and acts of genocide had been committed. In late December, South Africa filed a lawsuit against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), accusing it of violating the Genocide Convention**. In January 2024, the ICJ pursued the lawsuit after identifying plausible signs of genocide and ordered a series of precautionary measures.[133]

Since the escalation started in October, diplomatic channels were activated to try to address the crisis, both to try to guarantee access for humanitarian aid and to achieve a ceasefire. **It was not until November, with the mediation of Qatar, supported by the US and France, that Israel and Hamas agreed to a temporary cessation of hostilities that was in effect for one week**. During this period, over 100 Israeli and foreign hostages were released and 240 women and minors who had been detained in Israeli prisons (many under the category of "administrative detention") were freed. Attempts to establish a new truce or ceasefire continued until the end of 2023. At the same time, the crisis in Gaza gave rise to intense international discussions and tension, especially at the UN, revealing the great political and military support for Israel from the United States

The Gazan population was forced to move several times, was attacked on routes identified as "safe" by Israel and was forced to concentrate in increasingly smaller areas

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131. UN Women, *Statement on Gaza by UN Women Executive Director Sima Bahous*, 19 January 2024.
132. For more information, see chapter 3 (Gender, peace and security).
133. International Court of Justice, *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel) - The Court indicates provisional measures*, 26 January 2024.

and European countries that refused to demand a ceasefire based on the argument that they did not want to compromise Israel's alleged right to self-defence. Washington vetoed or threatened to veto several draft resolutions during 2023 and the UN Security Council only approved two that were limited to requesting pauses and unimpeded access to humanitarian aid, in addition to the unconditional release of the hostages, as around 136 remained in Gaza. However, it did not demand a sustained and immediate ceasefire under the terms that many had been demanding, including the UN Secretary-General. **The crisis in Gaza also caused a significant rise in tensions and hostilities in the Middle East**. Among other dynamics, it fuelled a growing confrontation between Hezbollah and Israeli forces[134] and the intensification of pro-Iranian militias' attacks on US targets in Iraq and Syria and attacks by Washington against the same groups.[135] In Yemen, the Houthis' attacks against Israel in response to its offensive on Gaza, then against ships that had a connection with or were bound for Israel in the Red Sea, prompted the deployment of an international military operation led by the US and opened another front of instability.[136]

The crisis in Gaza also caused a significant rise in tensions and hostilities in the Middle East

Syria	
Start:	2011
Type:	Government, System, Selfgovernment, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, pro-government militias, Free Syrian Army (FSA), Ahrar al-Sham, Syrian Democratic Forces (coalition that includes the YPG/YPJ militias of the PYD), Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (formerly al-Nusra Front), Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), ISIS, international anti-ISIS coalition led by USA, Türkiye, Hezbollah, Iran, Russia, Wagner Group, Israel
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑

Summary:
Controlled by the Ba'ath party since 1963, the Republic of Syria has been governed since the 1970s by two presidents: Hafez al-Assad and his son, Bashar, who took office in 2000. A key player in the Middle East and the Arab Israeli conflict, internally the regime has been characterised by authoritarianism and fierce repression of the opposition. The arrival of Bashar al-Assad in the government raised expectations for change, following the implementation of some liberalising measures. However, the regime put a stop to these initiatives, which alarmed the establishment, made up of the army, the Ba'ath and the Alawi minority. In

2011, popular uprisings in the region encouraged the Syrian population to demand political and economic changes. The brutal response of the government unleashed a severe crisis in the country, which led to the beginning of an armed conflict with serious consequences for the civil population. The militarisation and proliferation of armed actors have added complexities to the Syrian scenario, severely affected by regional and international dynamics.

Syria continued to be the scene of one of the most intense armed conflicts in the world. **In 2023, the violence rebounded slightly compared to recent years, though the death toll was far below what it had reached in the worst period**, five years ago, when tens of thousands of people died per year. According to figures released by ACLED, **6,254 deaths were reported due to acts of violence** linked to the conflict in 2023, more than the 5,649 fatalities in 2022 and the 5,735 in 2021.[137] The body count kept by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) totalled 4,361, but points to the same trend: it was highest in three years and reverses the downward trend observed. In fact, the SOHR indicated that 2022 had been considered the year with the lowest number of victims since the armed conflict began in 2011. SOHR data also indicates that 1,889 of the total number of people killed in 2023 were civilians, including 307 minors, which brings the number of girls and boys killed since the hostilities broke out to almost 24,000. **Violations of human rights and international humanitarian law continued to be reported throughout the country** during the year, both in areas controlled by Bashar Assad's regime and in those under the control of non-state actors. **The economic and humanitarian situation continued to deteriorate, with over 15 million people in need of assistance**. The challenges in this area were also aggravated by the consequences of the devastating earthquake that rocked Türkiye and Syria at the beginning of the year.

The earthquake in February caused between 6,000 and 8,500 deaths and extensive destruction in northwestern Syria, an area controlled by forces opposed to the regime and home to a large internally displaced population due to the armed conflict. The international response, including from the UN, was denounced as insufficient, while Damascus imposed obstacles to the delivery of aid. The Syrian regime attempted to take advantage of the impact of the earthquake to rehabilitate itself internationally and control the flows of humanitarian assistance and benefited from a partial lifting of sanctions. In fact, the catastrophe allowed Damascus to intensify diplomatic contact with several Arab countries and facilitated Syria's readmission into the Arab League in May. The change in the Arab League's

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134. See the summary on Israel – Hezbollah in this chapter.
135. See the summary on Iraq and Syria in this chapter.
136. See the summary on Yemen in this chapter.
137. ACLED Dashboard [Viewed on 5 February 2024].

stance towards Damascus could partially be explained by the desire to stop the flow of drugs leaving Syria with the complicity of the regime, particularly Captagon, and to address the issue of the Syrian refugee population in several countries in the region. With regard to the refugees, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic stated that the (relative) decline in the levels of violence is not in itself a criterion to guarantee safe return, considering the frequent reports of persecution, attacks and reprisals against those who have gone back.

Despite the devastation caused by the earthquakes, fighting between the warring parties resumed after a brief truce and hostilities intensified, especially in the last quarter of the year. The country remained divided into different areas of influence with various dynamics of violence and the involvement of many different armed actors. The most notable dynamics and acts of violence during the year included continued fighting in the northwest, mainly between Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and pro-government forces in areas of Idlib, Aleppo, Hama and Latakia. Following the death of a Russian colonel in an HTS attack in May, Russian and Syrian forces launched intense air strikes in southern Latakia. Competition between different factions for material and territorial interests also continued in the area. **The hostilities escalated in the northwest in early October after an attack on a military academy in Homs killed more than 100 people.** This led to fresh clashes and the forced displacement of over 120,000 people in the most serious escalation in the area since 2019. Fighting between the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), led by Kurdish YPG/YPJ forces, and Turkish military forces in areas around Aleppo, Al-Hasakah and Raqqa persisted in the northeast.[138] Clashes also took place at the end of the year between the SDF and Arab tribal groups, forcibly displacing around 27,000 people. SDF and US forces also conducted various operations against ISIS militants in 2023. Meanwhile, **ISIS continued to carry out attacks in eastern and southern Syria**. One of its bloodiest attacks occurred in Homs Governorate in February and claimed over 60 lives. In May, the organisation claimed responsibility for its first attack in Damascus since 2021. ISIS was also involved in clashes with Syrian government forces and Wagner Group mercenaries. In southern Syria, attacks continued against members and people related to the Syrian government, former

Despite the devastation caused by the earthquake, fighting between the warring parties resumed in Syria after a brief truce and hostilities intensified in the last quarter of the year

In June the UN General Assembly resolved to establish an independent institution to clarify the whereabouts of all missing persons in Syria

opposition combatants who have signed "reconciliation" agreements with it and civilians. In Daraa Governorate in June, Syrian forces launched a series of air strikes and military raids against armed opposition groups that refuse to "reconcile" with the government. They were the first such attacks in the area in five years. Additionally, incidents associated with drug trafficking multiplied, prompting a direct incursion by Jordan that caused the death of seven civilians in May. Amman had warned that it would take military action in Syria to halt drug trafficking and thereby joined the four other foreign countries that had intervened and/or were present in Syria: Iran, Russia, the United States and Israel. **Israeli forces conducted many air raids during the year, including attacks on the airports in Aleppo and Damascus**. In the first half of the year, the Israeli government acknowledged that it had doubled its attacks against Iranian targets in Syria since December 2022. **The instability stemming from the crisis in Gaza also had repercussions in Syria**. Thus, Israeli attacks in Syria against Iranian and Hezbollah targets intensified,[139] as did attacks by forces allegedly backed by Iran from Syria. Moreover, from October until the end of the year alone, pro-Iranian militias launched over 50 attacks against US forces stationed in Syria and Iraq, which led to counterattacks by Washington.[140] In late December, Tehran warned Israel of retaliation for the death of Iranian General Razi Mousavi in an Israeli strike in Syria. Throughout the year, mines and other explosive devices killed many civilians in different parts of the country.

In June, as a result of Syrian civil society initiatives, especially by family organisations, **the UN General Assembly resolved to establish an independent institution to clarify the whereabouts of all missing persons in Syria**. In 2023, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic also published an extensive report on continued mistreatment and torture in the country during the period 2020-23. It also covers more cases of people who had died in detention. The report studies cases that occurred in government detention centres and three armed groups that control territory and hold detainees (HTS, SNA, SDF) and concludes that, although the forms of torture and patterns of arbitrary detention and forced disappearance are similar, the scale is significantly larger in government-controlled areas.[141] In northeastern

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138. See the summary on Türkiye (south-east) in this chapter.
139. See the summary on Israel – Hezbollah in this chapter.
140. See the summary on Iraq in this chapter.
141. HRC, *No End in Sight: Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023*, A/HRC/53/CRP.5, 10 July 2023.
142. For more information, see chapter 3 (Gender, peace and security).

Syria, over 51,000 people, mostly women and children under 12 years old, including around 35,000 foreigners, were still being held in the al-Hawl and Roj camps. Regarding the gender impacts of the conflict and the specific repercussions on women and girls, during 2023 there were warnings about the enormous difficulties that female heads of household faced in meeting their basic needs, problems in accessing reproductive health, an increase in forced and early marriage throughout the country and worsening situations of discrimination and violence in both the public and private spheres.[142]

The Gulf

Yemen	
Start:	2004
Type:	System, Government, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Armed forces loyal to the internationally recognised Government, followers of the cleric al Houthi (alShabaab al-Mumen/Ansar Allah), tribal militias linked to al-Alhmar clan, Salafist militias (including Happy Yemen Brigades), armed groups linked to the Islamist Islah party, separatist groups under the umbrella of the Southern Transitional Council (STC), Joint Forces (including the Giants Brigades), Security Belt Forces, AQAP, ISIS, international coalition led by Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), the United States and the international military coalition involved in Operation Prosperity Guardian
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↓

Summary:
The conflict started in 2004, when the followers of the religious leader al-Houthi, belonging to the Shiite minority, started an armed rebellion in the north of Yemen. The government assured that the rebel forces aimed to re-establish a theocratic regime such as the one that governed in the area for one thousand years, until the triumph of the Republican revolution in 1962. The followers of al-Houthi denied it and accused the government of corruption and not attending to the northern mountainous regions, and also opposed the Sanaa alliance with the US in the so-called fight against terrorism. The conflict has cost the lives of thousands of victims and has led to massive forced displacements. Various truces signed in recent years have been successively broken with taking up of hostilities again. As part of the rebellion that ended the government of Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2011, the Houthis took advantage to expand areas under its control in the north of the country.

They have been increasingly involved in clashes with other armed actors, including tribal militias, sectors sympathetic to Salafist groups and to the Islamist party Islah and fighters of AQAP, the affiliate of al-Qaeda in Yemen. The advance of the Houthis to the centre and south of the country in 2014 exacerbated the institutional crisis and forced the fall of the Yemeni government, leading to an international military intervention led by Saudi Arabia in early 2015. In a context of internationalisation, the conflict has acquired sectarian tones and a regional dimension. The conflict has been acquiring a growing regional and international dimension and has been influenced by tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia and between Washington and Tehran. Additionally, Yemen has been the scene of al-Qaeda activities since the 1990s, especially since the merger of the Saudi and Yemeni branches that gave rise to al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in 2009. As of 2014, the group has taken advantage of the climate of instability in the country to advance its objectives and its militiamen have been involved in clashes with the Houthis, with government forces, with UAE troops and with tribal militias. Since alQaeda's attack on the USS Cole in 2000, the US has been involved in periodic attacks against the group. The conflict in Yemen has also favoured ISIS activity in the country. In 2023, the crisis in Gaza and its repercussions throughout the region also had an impact on Yemen, especially after the Houthis decided to launch attacks against Israel, Israeli ships and ships bound for Israel in the Red Sea, a route through which 15% of world maritime transport passes. The Houthis' actions prompted the establishment of an international military coalition in the area, made up of 20 countries and led by the United States, to launch Operation Prosperity Guardian.

In line with the trend observed in 2022, **the armed conflict was significantly less deadly in 2023 than in previous years. However, the body count remained high and the armed conflict in Yemen continued to be considered one of high intensity**. According to data collected by ACLED, at least 3,174 people died during the year in different acts of violence (battles, explosions and remote violence and violence against civilians),[143] which was just half those in 2022 (6,721 deaths) and well below the death tolls in previous years (between 20,000 and 23,000 fatalities per year from 2019 to 2021). Data gathered by the Civilian Impact Monitoring Project (CIMP), which documents civilian deaths in armed violence in Yemen, counted 501 people killed and 1,174 wounded in 2023, compared to 716 killed and 1,602 wounded the previous year. Since 2018, the total civilian deaths have hovered around 17,000, according to the CIMP.[144] **The relatively lower body count owes fundamentally to the de facto extension of the UN-backed truce agreed in 2022**. Though it was not formally renewed in September 2022, the truce and other aspects of the agreement generally remained in force until 2023. This happened in a year when the negotiations to address the dispute were more prominent, particularly direct contacts between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis mediated by Oman in a regional

143. ACLED Dashboard [Viewed on 1 February 2024].
144. Civilian Impact Monitoring Project [Viewed on 1 February 2024].

scenario also affected by the diplomatic rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, regional actors with important interests in the conflict.[145] Meanwhile, the UN continued to promote intra-Yemeni dialogue and the implementation of the Stockholm Agreement (2018). As part of this agreement, over a thousand prisoners were released in April: 869 freed by the Houthis and by the internationally recognised Saudi-backed government of Yemen and 104 released by Riyadh.

The hostilities continued in a context of fragility and complexity in 2023 due to the involvement of many different armed actors. Thus, there were clashes and exchanges of fire between the Houthis and pro-government forces along the front lines, but also acts of violence between armed groups not associated with the Houthis and tribal clashes, both in areas controlled by the government and in others held by the Houthis. At the same time, there were incidents blamed on the al-Qaeda branch in the country, AQAP, which remains active in the governorates of Abyan, Bayda, Hadramawt and Shabwah. AQAP also ceased its attacks against the Houthis in 2023 and set its sights on the main secessionist platform in southern Yemen, the Southern Transitional Council and the Security Belt Forces. Anti-Houthi forces, including the Presidential Leadership Council, the institution that has replaced the presidency, also continued to show internal struggles and conflicts. The use of provocative and bellicose rhetoric by various armed actors persisted and the Houthis displayed their military power in several parades and military exercises. The types of weapons displayed in these exhibitions, together with complaints about violations of the arms embargo against the Houthis, confirmed the group's own statements about the reinforcement of its land and naval military capabilities.

Various actors in the armed conflict continued to be denounced for violations of international humanitarian law and human rights, as documented by the international Panel of Experts established by the UN.[146] This panel documented arbitrary detentions, forced disappearances, torture and mistreatment, the recruitment of minors, sexual and gender-based violence, restrictions on freedom of expression and obstruction of the delivery of humanitarian aid. The Houthis were especially singled out for the alarming rise in the recruitment of minors, especially in summer camps; by the stricter imposition

The relatively lower body count in Yemen owes fundamentally to the de facto extension of the UN-backed truce agreed in 2022

At the end of the year, the situation in Yemen was also influenced by the crisis in Gaza, especially after the Houthis decided to launch attacks against Israel and Israeli-owned or Israel-bound ships in the Red Sea

of *mahram,* a system of control and surveillance imposed on women through male "guardians" that, among other things, continued to affect their access to sexual and reproductive health services; and by harassment and defamation campaigns against women activists, including those from the diaspora. During 2023, the women's organisation Abductees Mothers Association informed the UN Security Council of the results of its investigations, which **from 2016 to mid-2023 confirmed the kidnapping of 9,568 people by different actors in the conflict, the vast majority of them by the Houthis** (9,130 people, including 130 women). Thousands of people who have been released have reported to have been tortured and at least 140 have died as a result of mistreatment or poor medical practices while they were detained. By the end of the year, around 18 million people needed humanitarian assistance and were facing food insecurity. Malnutrition rates were especially alarming among the child population and 4.5 million people were displaced, some of them as a result of multiple forced displacements in recent years.

Negotiations between Riyadh and the Houthis intensified during the second half of 2023 and it emerged that the parties had made progress in defining a road map for a peace process in Yemen. At the year's end, the UN special envoy for Yemen continued to coordinate the different diplomatic efforts and connect the results of the Omani track with a dialogue involving the various Yemeni actors. This happened amid some groups' concern about the consequences of a possible agreement between Riyadh and the Houthis that could exclude the interests and concerns of other Yemeni groups. In December, there were indications of progress on a commitment to set the conditions for a global ceasefire and resume the UN-backed process. However, by that time the situation in Yemen had also been affected by the crisis in Gaza and growing regional instability.[147] In mid-October, **the Houthis decided to launch a series of attacks against Israel, then against Israeli-owned and/or Israel-bound ships in the Red Sea**, saying they would only halt these attacks once Israel stopped its military operation in the Gaza Strip. One of their most public attacks took place in November, when the Houthis released a video of a group of masked men disembarking from a helicopter and seizing a merchant ship that turned out to be owned by one of the main magnates of

145. See the summary on Yemen in chapter 6 (Peace negotiations in the Middle East) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

146. UNSC, *Final report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2140 (2014), S/2023/833*, 2 November 2023.

147. See the summary on Israel-Palestine in this chapter.

Israel. In this context, the US fleet deployed in the area intervened on several occasions to halt Houthi activities. In December, Washington announced an international military operation in the area (Operation Prosperity Guardian) involving 20 countries with the stated objective of protecting the Red Sea trade route, through which 15% of world maritime traffic passes. According to media reports, at the end of the year Washington was pressuring Saudi Arabia to postpone its agreement with the Houthis on the future of Yemen and urging it to join the international military coalition against them.[148]

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148. See "Yemen: escalating tension in the Red Sea" in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Risk scenarios and opportunities for peace*, January 2024.

Map 2.1. **Socio-political crises**

Countries with socio-political crises

* The Russia – US, NATO, EU tension is indicated on this map in a simplified manner, for reasons of graphic representation. Not all the countries that are part of NATO or those that are part of the EU have been marked, but Belgium as a country that hosts the headquarters of the EU and NATO, Russia and the USA.
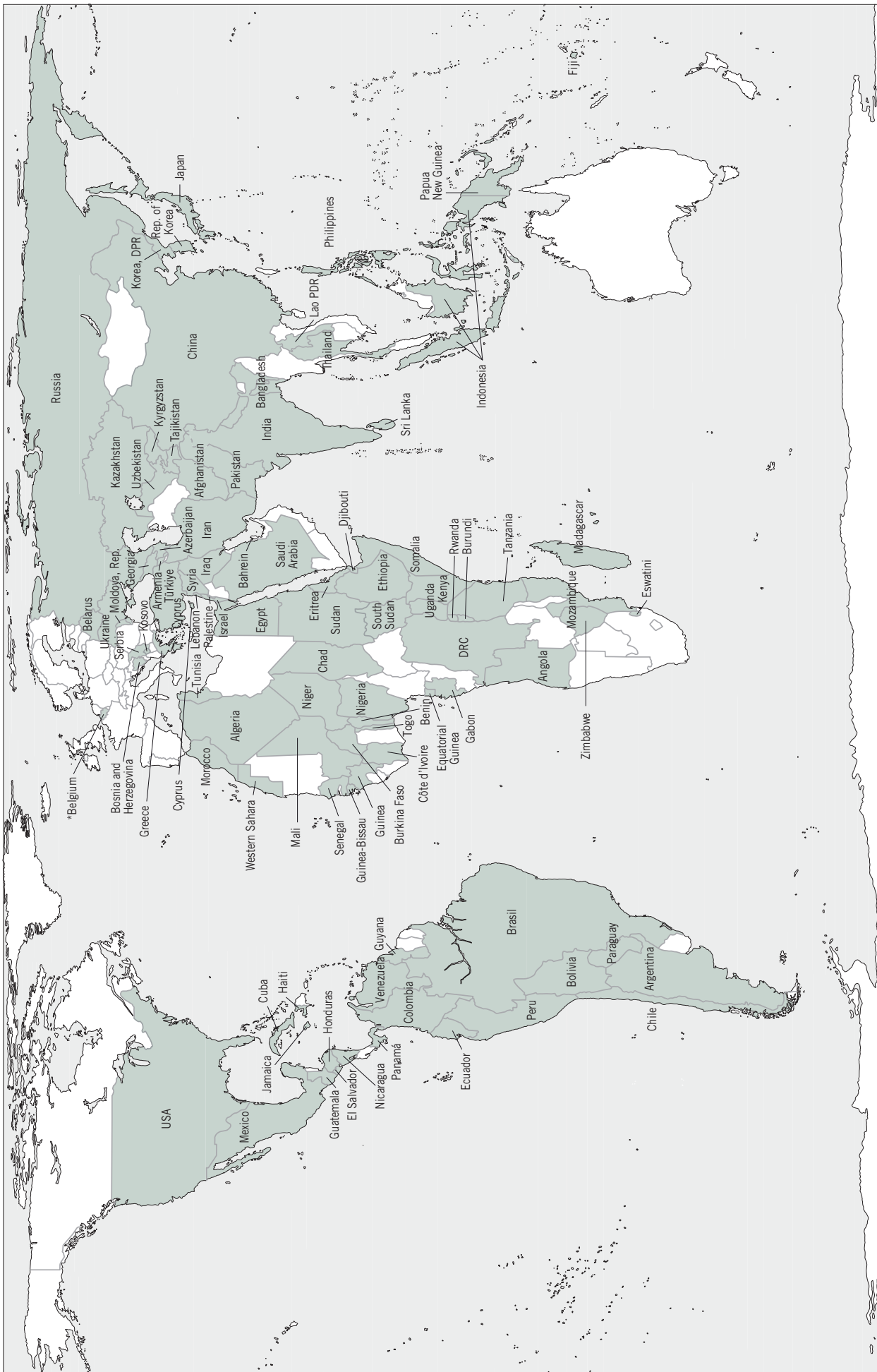
2. Socio-political crises

- There were 114 socio-political crises around the world in 2023. They mainly took place in Africa (38) and Asia and the Pacific (33), while the rest were in the Americas (20), Europe (13) and the Middle East (10).
- The political crisis between the Senegalese government and the opposition worsened during the year, triggering many protests and clashes with security forces that left dozens dead.
- The situation in the DRC got worse during 2023 as a consequence of electoral political violence and escalating violence in the armed conflicts in the country.
- Ethiopia remained seriously unstable due to the regional crises, the fragile implementation of the peace agreement in Tigray and the impacts of the wars in Oromia and Amhara.
- In Tunisia, the president continued to behave in a more authoritarian manner and attacks and policies increased against the sub-Saharan migrant and asylum-seeking population.
- The security situation and the humanitarian crisis seriously deteriorated in Haiti, with a substantial rise in the homicide rate while hundreds of armed gangs expanded their territorial control.
- Ecuador experienced a serious political crisis and an unprecedented spike in violence, prompting the declaration of a state of emergency.
- Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan deteriorated markedly and Pakistan began to deport hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees.
- Tension seriously escalated in the Indian state of Manipur, where intercommunity clashes between the Meitei and Kuki populations killed more than 170 people.
- In the Indonesian region of Papua New Guinea, there was a leap in the frequency, lethality and territorial scope of clashes between the Indonesian Armed Forces and the armed group OPM.
- An Azerbaijani military offensive led to the dismantling of the self-proclaimed republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, its annexation by Azerbaijan and the forced exodus of almost its entire Armenian population.
- In 2023, the Iranian authorities continued their crackdown on the "Women, Life, Freedom" movement and on their critics.

This chapter analyses the socio-political crises that occurred in 2023. It is organised into three sections. The socio-political crises and their characteristics are defined in the first section. In the second section, we analyse the global and regional trends of the socio-political crises in 2023. The third section describes the development and key events of the year in the various contexts. A map is included at the start of chapter that indicates the countries affected by socio-political crises in 2023.

2.1. Socio-political crises: definition

A socio-political crisis is defined as that in which the pursuit of certain objectives or the failure to satisfy certain demands made by different actors leads to high levels of political, social or military mobilisation and/or the use of violence with a level of intensity that does not reach that of an armed conflict and that may include clashes, repression, coups d'état and bombings or attacks of other kinds, and whose escalation may degenerate into an armed conflict under certain circumstances. Socio-political crises are normally related to: a) demands for self-determination and self-government, or identity issues; b) opposition to the political, economic, social or ideological system of a state, or the internal or international policies of a government, which in both cases produces a struggle to take or erode power; or c) control of resources or territory.

Table 2.1. Summary of socio-political crises in 2023

Conflict[1] -beginning-	Type[2]	Main parties	Intensity[3] Trend[4]
AFRICA			
Algeria	Internal	Government, military power, political and social opposition, Hirak movement, jihadist armed groups	1
	Government, System		↓
Benin	Internalised internal	Government, regional armed actors	2
	Government		=
Burkina Faso	Internalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, army sectors	2
	Government		↓
Chad	Internal	Transitional Military Council, political and social opposition (including the coalition Wakit Tama, which includes the party Les Transformateurs), Chadian armed groups (52 groups, including the main ones: FACT, CCMSR, UFDD, UFR), community militias, private militias	3
	Government, Resources, Territory, Identity		↓
Côte d'Ivoire	Internalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, regional armed actors	2
	Government, Identity, Resources		=
Djibouti	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, armed group FRUD-Armé	1
	Government		=
DRC	Internal	Government led by the Union Sacrée coalition (led by Félix Tshisekedi and made up of different political actors, including dissidents from former President Joseph Kabila's Front Commun pour le Congo coalition), political opposition (including Front Commun pour le Congo and Lamuka) and social opposition	3
	Government		↑
DRC – Rwanda[5]	International	Government of the DRC, government of Rwanda, Rwandan armed group FDLR, pro-Rwandan Congolese armed group M23 (formerly CNDP)	3
	Identity, Government, Resources		↑
Equatorial Guinea	Internal	Government, political opposition in exile	1
	Government		=
Eritrea	Internalised internal	Government, political-military opposition coalition EDA (EPDF, EFDM, EIPJD, ELF, EPC, DMLEK, RSADO, ENSF, EIC, Nahda), other groups	1
	Government, Self-government, Identity		=
Eritrea – Ethiopia	International	Eritrea, Ethiopia	3
	Territory		↑
Ethiopia	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, various armed groups	3
	Government		=
Ethiopia – Egypt – Sudan	International	Ethiopia, Egypt, Sudan	2
	Resources		↓
Ethiopia – Somalia	International	Ethiopia, Somalia, Somaliland	2
	Government, Territory, Resources		↑
Ethiopia – Sudan	International	Ethiopia, Sudan, community militias	1
	Resources		↓

1. This column includes the states in which socio-political crises are taking place, specifying in brackets the region within each state to which the crisis is confined or the name of the armed group involved in the conflict. This last option is used in cases involving more than one socio-political crisis in the same state or in the same territory within a state, for the purpose of distinguishing them.
2. This report classifies and analyses socio-political crises using two criteria: on the one hand, the causes or clashes of interests and, on the other hand, the convergence between the scenario of conflict and the actors involved. The following causes can be distinguished: demands for self-determination and self-government (Self-government) or identity aspirations (Identity); opposition to the political, economic, social or ideological system of a state (System) or the internal or international policies of a government (Government), which in both cases produces a struggle to take or erode power; or struggle for the control of resources (Resources) or territory (Territory). Regarding the second type, the sociopolitical crises may be of an internal, internationalised internal or international nature. As such, an internal socio-political crisis involves actors from the state itself who operate exclusively within its territory. Secondly, internationalised internal socio-political crises are defined as those in which at least one of the main actors is foreign and/or the crisis spills over into the territory of neighbouring countries. Thirdly, international socio-political crises are defined as those that involve conflict between state or non-state actors of two or more countries.
3. The intensity of a socio-political crisis (high, medium or low) and its trend (escalation, decrease, no changes) is mainly evaluated on the basis of the level of violence reported and the degree of socio-political mobilisation.
4. This column compares the trend of the events of 2023 with 2022, using the ↑ symbol to indicate that the general situation during 2023 is more serious than in the previous one, the ↓ symbol to indicate an improvement in the situation and the = symbol to indicate that no significant changes have taken place.
5. Although the DRC-Rwanda crisis is not explored in this chapter, elements of this crisis are included in the DRC summary in this chapter, in the DRC (east) summary in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts) and in the analysis included in the risk scenario "Rwanda: never again?" in chapter 5 (Risk scenarios).

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity / Trend
AFRICA			
Gabon	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Government		↑
Guinea	Internal	Government, Armed Forces, opposition political parties, trade unions	2
	Government		↑
Guinea-Bissau	Internationalised internal	Transitional government, Armed Forces, political opposition, international drug trafficking networks	1
	Government		↓
Kenya	Internationalised internal	Government, ethnic militias, political and social opposition (political parties, civil society organisations), armed group SLDF, Mungiki sect, MRC party, Somali armed group al-Shabaab and groups sympathetic to al-Shabaab in Kenya, ISIS	3
	Government, System, Resources, Identity, Self-government		↑
Madagascar	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		↑
Mali	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, ECOWAS	2
	Government		↓
Morocco – Western Sahara	International[6]	Morocco, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), armed group POLISARIO Front	2
	Self-government, Identity, Territory		↓
Mozambique	Internal	Government, RENAMO	1
	Government, System		↑
Niger[7]	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Government		↑
Nigeria	Internal	Government, political opposition, civil society organisations, Christian and Muslim communities, ranchers and farmers, community militias, criminal groups, IMN	3
	Identity, Resources, Government		=
Nigeria (Biafra)	Internationalised internal	Government, separatist organisations MASSOB, IPOB (which has an armed wing, the ESN)	3
	Identity, Self-government		=
Nigeria (Niger Delta)	Internal	Government, armed groups, MEND, MOSOP, NDPVF, NDV, NDA, NDGJM, IWF, REWL, PANDEF, Joint Revolutionary Council, militias of the Ijaw, Itsereki, Urhobo and Ogoni communities, private security groups	1
	Identity, Resources		=
Rwanda	Internationalised internal	Government, Rwandan armed group FDLR, political opposition, dissident factions of the ruling party (RPF), Rwandan diaspora in other countries in Africa and the West	1
	Government, Identity		=
Rwanda – Burundi	International	Government of Rwanda, government of Burundi, armed groups	1
	Government		=
Senegal	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Government		↑
Senegal (Casamance)	Internal	Government, factions of the armed group Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC)	1
	Self-government		↓
Sierra Leone	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, army sectors	1
	Government		↑
Sudan – South Sudan	International	Government of Sudan, government of South Sudan, community militias	2
	Resources, Identity		↑

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6. Although Western Sahara is not an internationally recognised state, the socio-political crisis between Morocco and Western Sahara is considered "international" and not "internal" since it is a territory that has yet to be decolonised and Morocco's claims to the territory are not recognised by international law or by any United Nations resolution.
7. Although the tension in Niger is not explored in this chapter, elements of this crisis are included in the summary of the Western Sahel region in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity / Trend
AFRICA			
Tanzania	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		↓
Tunisia	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, jihadist armed groups	3
	Government, System		↑
Uganda	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, ADF	2
	Government		↑
Zimbabwe	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		=
AMERICA			
Argentina	Government	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Internal		↑
Bolivia	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Government, Self-government, Identity		↑
Brazil	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, organised crime groups	2
	Government		↑
Chile	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Government, Self-government, Identity		↑
Colombia	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		↑
Cuba	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government, System		↑
Ecuador	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, organised crime groups	3
	Government, Resources		↑
El Salvador	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, organised bands (drug trafficking, gangs)	3
	Government		↓
Guatemala	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, organised crime groups	2
	Government		↑
Haiti	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, organised crime groups	3
	Government		↑
Honduras	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, organised crime groups	3
	Government		↑
Jamaica	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, organised crime groups	1
	Government		↓
Mexico	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, organised crime groups, armed opposition groups	3
	Government, Resources, Identity		=
Nicaragua	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Government		↑
Panama	Government	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Internal		↑
Paraguay	Government	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Internal		↑

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity / Trend
AMERICA			
Peru	Internal	Government, armed opposition (Militarised Communist Party of Peru), political and social opposition (farmer and indigenous organisations)	3
	Government, Resources		↑
USA	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, citizen militias	1
	Government		↓
Venezuela	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	3
	Government		↓
Venezuela – Guyana	Government	Venezuela, Guyana	3
	International		↑
ASIA AND THE PACIFIC			
Afghanistan – Pakistan	International	Afghanistan, Pakistan	3
	Government		↑
Bangladesh	Internal	Government (Awami League), political opposition (Bangladesh National Party and Jamaat-e-Islami), International Crimes Tribunal, armed groups (Ansar-al-Islam, JMB)	2
	Government		=
China (Hong Kong)	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Self-government, Identity, System		↑
China (Tibet)	Internalised internal	Chinese government, Dalai Lama and Tibetan government in exile, political and social opposition in Tibet	1
	Self-government, Identity, System		=
China (Xinjiang)	Internationalised internal	Government, armed opposition (ETIM, ETLO), political and social opposition	1
	Self-government, Identity, System		=
China – Japan	International	China, Japan, USA	3
	Territory, Resources		↑
China – Philippines	International	China, Philippines, USA	3
	Territory, Resources		↑
China – Taiwan	International	China, Taiwan, USA	3
	Territory, Resources, System		↑
China – USA	International	China, USA	2
	System, Government, Territory		↑
Fiji	Internal	Government, political opposition	1
	Government		=
India (Manipur)	Internal	Government, armed groups (PLA, PREPAK, PREPAK (Pro), KCP, KYKL, RPF, UNLF, KNF, KNA)	3
	Self-government, Identity		↑
India (Nagaland)	Internal	Government, armed groups NSCN-K, NSCN-IM, NSCN (K-K), NSCN-R, NNC, ZUF	1
	Identity, Self-government		=
India – China	International	India, China	3
	Territory		↓
India – Pakistan	International	India, Pakistan	2
	Identity, Territory		↓
Indonesia (Sulawesi)	Internal	Government, armed group MIT	1
	System, Identity		=
Indonesia (West Papua)	Internal	Government, armed group OPM, political and social opposition, Papuan indigenous groups	3
	Self-government, Identity, Resources		↑

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity / Trend

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity Trend
ASIA			
Japan – Russia (Kuril Islands)	International	Japan, Russia	1
	Territory, Resources		=
Kazakhstan	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, local and regional armed groups	1
	System, Government		↓
Korea, DPR	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	System, Government		=
Korea, DPR – Rep. of Korea	International	DPR Korea, Rep. of Korea	3
	System		↑
Korea, DPR – USA, Japan, Rep. of Korea[8]	International	DPR Korea, USA, Japan, Rep. of Korea, China, Russia	3
	Government		↑
Kyrgyzstan	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, regional armed groups, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	1
	System, Government, Identity, Resources, Territory		↑
Kyrgyzstan – Tajikistan	International	Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan	1
	Territory, resources		↓
Lao, PDR	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, political and armed organisations of Hmong origin	1
	System, Identity		=
Pakistan	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Government		↓
Papua New Guinea	Internal	Government, community militias, government of Bougainville	3
	Identity, Resources, Territory, Self-governmen		↑
South China Sea	International	China, Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam	2
	Territory, Resources		↑
Sri Lanka	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Government		↓
Tajikistan	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, former warlords, regional armed groups, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan	2
	Government, System, Resources, Territory		=
Tajikistan (Gorno-Badakhshan)	Internal	Government, informal local leaders of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO), social opposition to the central government in the GBAO, China	1
	Identity, Government		↓
Thailand	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		↓
Uzbekistan	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, regional armed groups, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan	1
	Government, System, Territory		↑
Uzbekistan (Karakalpakstan)	Internal	Government, social opposition in the autonomous region of Karakalpakstan	1
	Self-government, Identity		↓
EUROPE			
Armenia – Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh)	International	Azerbaijan, Armenia, self-proclaimed Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia, Türkiye	3
	Self-government, Identity, Territory		↑
Belarus	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, EU, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, USA, Ukraine, NATO, Russia	2
	Government		↑
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Internationalised internal	State institutions, institutions of sub-state entities (Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina), high representative of the international community, USA, EU, NATO, Serbia, Russia	2
	Self-government, Identity, Government		↑

8. This international socio-political crisis affects other countries that have not been mentioned, which are involved to varying degrees.

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity / Trend

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity
			Trend
EUROPE			
Georgia (Abkhazia)	Internationalised internal	Georgia, self-proclaimed Republic of Abkhazia, Russia	1
	Self-government, Identity, Government		↑
Georgia (South Ossetia)	Internationalised internal	Georgia, self-proclaimed Republic of South Ossetia, Russia	1
	Self-government, Identity		↑
Moldova	Internationalised internal	Government, political opposition, Russia, EU, Ukraine, NATO	2
	Government		↑
Moldova, Rep. of (Transdniestria)	Internationalised internal	Moldova, self-proclaimed Republic of Transdniestria, Russia, Ukraine	2
	Self-government, Identity		=
Russia	Internationalised internal	Government, Wagner Group, political and social opposition, armed opposition actors	3
	Government		↑
Russia (North Caucasus)	Internal	Russian federal government, governments of the republics of Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, armed opposition groups (Caucasus Emirate and ISIS), social opposition in the diaspora	1
	System, Identity, Government		↑
Russia – USA, NATO, EU	Internacional	Russia, Belarus, USA, NATO, EU, United Kingdom, Ukraine	2
	Sistema, Gobierno, Territorio, Recursos		↑
Serbia – Kosovo	International[9]	Serbia, Kosovo, political and social representatives of the Serbian community of Kosovo, UN mission (UNMIK), NATO mission (KFOR), EU mission (EULEX)	2
	Self-government, Identity, Government		↑
Türkiye	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, ISIS, organisation of Fetullah Gülen	2
	Government, System		↑
Türkiye – Greece, Cyprus	International	Türkiye, Greece, Republic of Cyprus, self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus	1
	Territory, Resources, Self-government, Identity		↓
MIDDLE EAST			
Bahrain	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government, Identity		=
Egypt	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Government		=
Iran	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	3
	Government		=
Iran (northwest)	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, armed groups (PJAK, PDKI and Komala), Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Iraq	2
	Self-government, Identity		↓
Iran (Sistan and Balochistan)	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, armed groups Jundallah (Soldiers of God / People's Resistance Movement), Harakat Ansar Iran and Jaish al-Adl, Pakistan	2
	Self-government, Identity		↓
Iran – USA, Israel[10]	International	Iran, USA, Israel	3
	System, Government		=
Iraq (Kurdistan)	Internationalised internal	Government, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Türkiye, Iran, PKK	1
	Self-government, Identity, Resources, Territory		=
Lebanon	Internationalised internal	Government, Hezbollah (party and militia), political and social opposition	2
	Government, System		=

9. The socio-political crisis between Kosovo and Serbia is considered "international" because even though its international legal status remains unclear, Kosovo has been recognised as a state by over 100 countries. However, the International Court of Justice issued an advisory opinion in 2010 establishing that Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence did not violate international law.
10. This international socio-political crisis refers mainly to the dispute over the Iranian nuclear programme.

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity
			Trend
MIDDLE EAST			
Palestine	Internal	ANP, Fatah, armed group Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, Hamas and its armed wing, the Ezzedin al-Qassam Brigades, Salafist groups	1
	Government		=
Saudi Arabia	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, armed groups, including AQAP and branches of ISIS (Hijaz Province, Najd Province)	1
	Government, Identity		=

1: low intensity; 2: medium intensity; 3: high intensity.
↑: escalation of tension; ↓: decrease of tension; =: no changes.
The socio-political crises in bold are described in the chapter.

2.2. Socio-political crises: analysis of trends in 2023

This section examines the general trends observed in areas experiencing socio-political crises throughout 2023, at both the global and regional levels.

2.2.1. Global trends

There were 114 socio-political crises around the world in 2023, six more than in 2022, in line with the climbing trend in the number of socio-political crises reported in recent years (31 more since 2018). Africa and Asia and the Pacific were the regions in the world with the highest number of socio-political crises (38 and 33, respectively), followed by the Americas (20), Europe (13) and the Middle East (10). Thirteen new cases were identified in 2023, concentrated mainly in Africa and the Americas: Ethiopia-Somalia; Gabon; Madagascar; Senegal; Sierra Leone; Togo; Argentina; Panama; Paraguay; Venezuela-Guyana; Afghanistan-Pakistan; China-Philippines; and Russia-USA, NATO, EU. Seven other cases were no longer classified socio-political crises, most of them in Africa: Central Africa (LRA), Eswatini, Sudan, Somalia (Somaliland-Puntland), India, India (Assam) and Israel-Syria-Lebanon. The socio-political crises in Central Africa (LRA), Eswatini, India and India (Assam) were removed from consideration due to a drop in intensity, whereas those in Sudan, Somalia (Somaliland-Puntland)[11] and Israel-Syria-Lebanon[12] were reclassified as armed conflicts.

For one more year in 2023, one of the most notable aspects of our analysis of the socio-political crises is

In 2023, the number of socio-political crises increased again to 114, which was 31 more cases since 2018

that **half of them (49%) worsened compared to the previous year**. In 28% of the socio-political crises there were no observable changes and in 23% the tension eased. This was reflected in part by a **rise in the number of high-intensity cases, from 28 in 2022 to 31 in 2023**: Chad; Eritrea-Ethiopia; Ethiopia; Kenya; Nigeria; Nigeria (Biafra); DRC; DRC-Rwanda; Tunisia; Ecuador; El Salvador; Haiti; Honduras; Mexico; Peru; Venezuela; Venezuela-Guyana; Afghanistan-Pakistan; China-Japan; China-Taiwan; China-Philippines; North Korea-US, Japan, South Korea; North Korea-South Korea; India (Manipur); India-China; Indonesia (West Papua); Papua New Guinea; Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh); Russia; Iran; and Iran-US, Israel. In addition to the 31 high-intensity cases, which accounted for nearly one third of the total, 39% of the 114 socio-political crises were of low intensity (in 2022 this percentage was 42%) and 33% were of medium intensity (32% in 2022). As such, **the trend of 2022 was repeated in 2023, raising the number and average intensity of the socio-political crises**. The intensity of the socio-political crises especially rose in Europe (where 85% of cases escalated) and in the Americas (where 75% did so). In the Middle East, 80% of the socio-political crises maintained a dynamic similar to the previous year.

The socio-political crises continued to be predominantly **multi-causal**, with two or more causes identified in 56% of the crises. Opposition to the political, economic, social or ideological **system** of a state or to the internal or international policies of a **government** were factors in 75% of the crises analysed; demands for self-

11. In early 2023, there was an escalation of fighting between the security forces of Somaliland (a self-proclaimed independent region of Somalia whose status is still disputed) and the militias of the regions of Sool, Sannag and Cayn, which are part of Somaliland and call themselves the SSC-Khatumo administration. Somaliland and Puntland have had their own historical dispute over the control of these border regions since 1998, when Puntland was established as an autonomous republic. This dispute has currently set off an armed conflict between the militias of these regions and Somaliland. This case is renamed Somalia (Somaliland-SSC Khatumo). For more information, see the summary on Somalia (Somaliland-SSC Khatumo) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).
12. The dynamics of this context are analysed in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts) under the heading "Israel-Hezbollah".

Box 2.1. High intensity socio-political crises in 2023

AFRICA (9)	ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (10)	MIDDLE EAST (2)
Chad	Afghanistan-Pakistan	Iran
Eritrea-Ethiopia	China-Japan	Iran-US, Israel
Ethiopia	China-Taiwan	
Kenya	China-Philippines	**AMERICA (8)**
Nigeria	North Korea-US, Japan, South Korea	Ecuador
Nigeria (Biafra)	North Korea-South Korea	El Salvador
DRC	India (Manipur)	Haiti
DRC-Rwanda	India-China	Honduras
Tunisia	Indonesia (West Papua)	Mexico
	Papua New Guinea	Peru
		Venezuela
		Venezuela-Guyana
		EUROPE (2)
		Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh)
		Russia

determination and **self-government**, or identity-related aspirations were present in 356%; and control of **resources** or **territory** were found in 31%. These figures maintain a certain continuity with those of the previous year. In a disaggregated analysis of factors, opposition to the **government's** internal or international policies was once again the most predominant cause and was present in 69% of the 114 socio-political crises, a similar percentage to the previous year. Thirty such cases were identified in Africa, equivalent to 79% of the cases in the region. In the Americas, there were 19 cases, equivalent to 95% (only in the crisis of Venezuela-Guyana was it not a factor). There were 14 in Asia and the Pacific (42%), nine in Europe and seven in the Middle East, accounting for 69% and 70% of all crises there, respectively. The second most prevalent factor, **identity-related aspirations** (33%), was especially significant in Europe (62%) and the Middle East (50%). Next, with very similar percentages, were issues related to the control of **resources** (24%), **demands for self-determination and self-government**

Half the socio-political crises identified in 2023 (49%) worsened compared to the previous year and only 23% improved

(22%), **opposition** to the political, social or ideological **system** of the state as a whole (20%) and the control of **territory** (20%). The different factors causing the socio-political crises also oscillated greatly between regions. For example, opposition to the government is present in 95% of the crises in the Americas, while in Asia and the Pacific it was found in 64% of all cases. However, demands for self-determination and/or self-government are only seen in 15% of the crises in the Americas and in 29% in Africa, compared to 62% in Europe. Nearly half the crises in Asia and the Pacific were linked to the controlling and accessing resources and territory (45%).

Approximately half the socio-political tensions worldwide were **internal in nature (49%)**, though with a pronounced geographic variability (90% of the crises in the Americas and 8% in Europe). Nearly one fourth of the crises (23%) were **international**, but some were among the most intense in the world: Eritrea-Ethiopia; DRC-Rwanda; Venezuela-Guyana; Afghanistan-Pakistan; China-Japan; China-Taiwan; China-Philippines; North Korea-US, Japan, South Korea; North Korea-South Korea; India-China; Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh); and Iran-US, Israel. Finally, over one quarter (28%) of the crises were **internationalised internal**, meaning that one of the main actors is foreign and/or that the tension extends to the territory of neighbouring countries. Once again, major variations were observed between regions (62% of the crises in Europe were of this type, while only one was reported in Latin American, the socio-political crisis in Ecuador).

In a more detailed geographical analysis, some of the subregions with the highest number of crises were, in this order: West Africa (14 cases); East Asia (12); Central Africa and the Great Lakes region (11); South America

## Graph 2.1. Trending number of socio-political crises 2018-2023
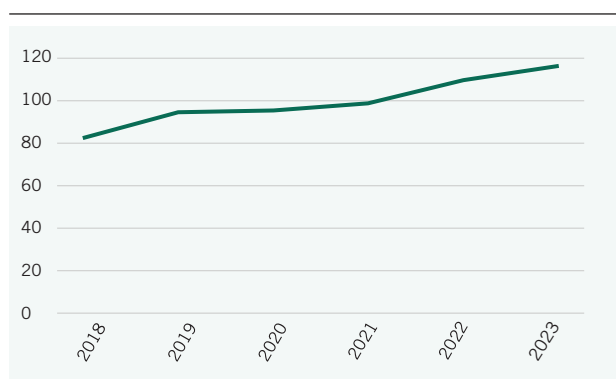
(10); South Asia, the Horn of Africa and the Gulf (seven each); Russia and the Caucasus (six); Central America (five); and the Mashreq, South-east Europe, Central Asia and South-east Asia (four each). The countries that suffered the most crises in their territory or whose governments were main actors in the greatest number of foreign disputes were, in this order: Russia (12 cases); China (11); USA (10); Ethiopia, Iran and Tajikistan (five each); India, Ukraine, Türkiye, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan (four); and Nigeria, Sudan, Rwanda, Indonesia, Japan and North Korea (three).[13]

2.2.2. Regional trends

As in recent years, **Africa** was the region with the highest number of socio-political crises (38), upholding the same percentage of all cases (33%) as the previous year. Four crises were reclassified during the year, namely Central Africa (LRA), Eswatini, Sudan and Somalia (Somaliland and Puntland), while six new crises were added: Ethiopia-Somalia, Gabon, Madagascar, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. The crisis in Gabon is related to a successful coup d'état that took place and the crisis in Sierra Leone is connected with a failed coup attempt. Senegal and Madagascar's crises are related to rising political tension between the government and the political opposition. The case of Togo is included due to the growing impact there coming from the cross-border dynamics of the armed conflict in the Western Sahel region. Finally, the tension between Ethiopia and Somalia owes to their deteriorating relationship stemming from the agreement between Ethiopia and Somaliland, a region that is part of Somalia, despite its de facto independence since 1991, which is not internationally recognised. The agreement included Ethiopia's future international recognition of Somaliland and other actions. Broken down by subregions, West Africa was the part of Africa (and the world) with the highest number of crises (14), including Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Nigeria (Biafra), Nigeria (Niger Delta), Senegal, Senegal (Casamance), Sierra Leone and Togo. In second place was Central Africa and the Great Lakes region (11): Chad, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, DRC, DRC-Rwanda, Kenya, Rwanda, Rwanda-Burundi, Sudan-South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. These were followed by the Horn of Africa (7 – Djibouti, Eritrea, Eritrea-Ethiopia, Ethiopia, Ethiopia-Egypt-Sudan, Ethiopia-Sudan and Ethiopia-Somalia; Southern Africa (3 – Madagascar, Mozambique and Zimbabwe); and North Africa-Maghreb (3 – Algeria, Morocco-Western Sahara and Tunisia). Finally, several countries suffered from various socio-political crises, such as Ethiopia (five crises) and Nigeria, Sudan and Rwanda (three).

During 2023, 114 socio-political crises were identified: 38 in Africa, 33 in Asia and the Pacific, 20 in the Americas, 13 in Europe and 10 in the Middle East

Graph 2.2. **Regional distribution of the number of socio-political crises in 2023**
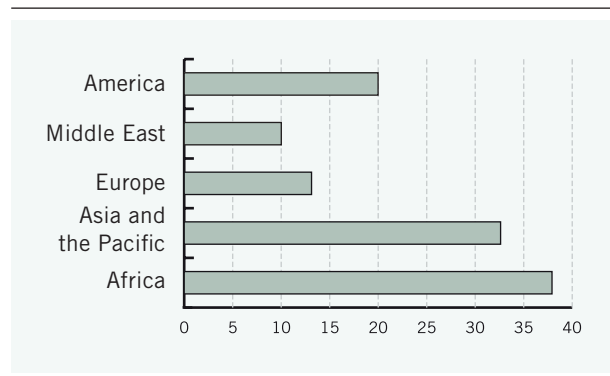
Graph 2.3. **Intensity of the socio-political crises by region**
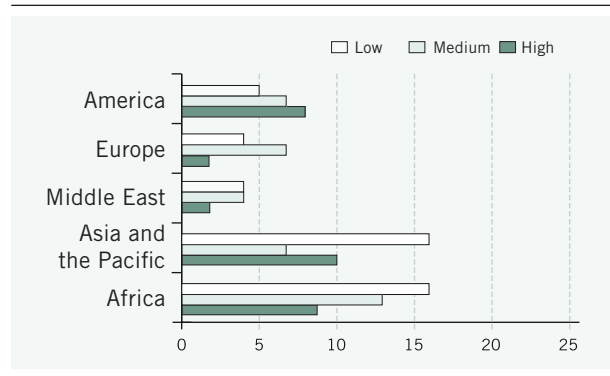
After Asia and the Pacific, Africa was the region with the second-highest number of high-intensity crises (nine of 38), equivalent to 24% of all cases there and one fewer than those identified the previous year (10 of 36). Overall, 42% of the socio-political crises were of low intensity, 34% were of medium intensity and 24% were of high intensity. The high-intensity crises were: Chad, Eritrea-Ethiopia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Nigeria (Biafra), DRC, DRC-Rwanda and Tunisia. Forty-two per cent of the socio-political crises got worse, 32% did not report any fundamental changes and the remaining 26% decreased. During the year, the number of worsening crises in Africa rose from 13 in 2022 to 16, including the cases of Ethiopia-Eritrea, Ethiopia-Somalia and Rwanda-DRC; countries that experienced coups d'état, whether they succeeded or not, namely Gabon and Sierra Leone; and countries that were gripped by deep political crises, meaning the DRC, Mozambique, Senegal, Uganda and others. Two crises escalated significantly during the year, Sudan and Somalia (Somaliland and Puntland) and were considered armed conflicts, so overall the violence became more intense compared to the previous year. The most predominant causes of the crises in the

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13. The actors appearing in the table as main actors of the socio-political crisis are included in the count.

region were once again opposition to the government or the system, which were found in most of them (79%, or 30 of 38), while control over resources and/or territory (12) and identity-related issues or demands for self-government and self-determination (11) accounted for 32% and 29%, respectively. These data are continuous with those of the previous year. Finally, internal tensions accounted for 47% of the cases (50% in 2022), internationalised internal crises accounted for 32% (28% in 2021) and international tensions accounted for 21% (22% in 2021). In all cases, these percentages were very similar to the world average.

The subregion of West Africa was the part of the world with the highest number of socio-political crises (14)

Twenty socio-political crises were reported in the **Americas** (18% of the total), four more than in 2022: Argentina, Panama, Paraguay and Venezuela-Guyana. Most of those 20 cases were located in South America (10), followed by Central America (5), the Caribbean (3) and North America (2). A significant characteristic of the region is that there was an escalation of tension in 75% of the crises, while violence subsided in only 20%. This caused the average intensity of the crises in the region to rise significantly compared to the previous year, as high-intensity cases climbed from 31% in 2022 to 40% in 2023. However, low-intensity cases fell by half, from 50% in 2022 to 25% in 2023. Similarly, medium-intensity cases also grew in 2023 to represent 35% of the total, compared to 19% of 2022. In comparative terms, the Americas were once again the region of the world with the highest proportion of high-intensity cases: Ecuador, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela and Venezuela-Guyana. The crises in Ecuador, Haiti, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela had already been classified as high-intensity in 2022 and in previous years, while conflict dynamics rose significantly in El Salvador and Honduras in 2023 and the dispute between Venezuela and Guyana over the Essequibo region (a territory historically claimed by Venezuela, but formally under the effective control and administration of the government of Guyana) increased tension between them. The number of homicides clearly fell in El Salvador, but the detention of tens of thousands of people continued to be reported under the state of emergency and many organisations complained of the deterioration of the human rights situation, Bukele's unprecedented concentration of power and growing authoritarian inclinations in the country. In Honduras, there was an increase in social and political protests during the year, many reported human rights violations linked to the declaration of the state of emergency in December 2022 and a major political crisis paralysed Parliament for four months. Finally, the government of Venezuela's decision to call a referendum on the annexation of Essequibo and to implement actions to make its results effective caused a major political and

Tension rose in 75% of the socio-political crises in the Americas, once again making it the region with the highest proportion of high-intensity cases (40%)

diplomatic crisis in the region, with several countries undergoing military mobilisation.

Nineteen of the 20 crises identified were linked to opposition to the government's domestic or international policies, except for the socio-political crisis between Venezuela-Guyana, which is related to control over resources and territory. Factors such as control of resources and identity-related issues were associated with three crises each, while dynamics linked to self-government were behind two others and opposition to the system was found in only one (Cuba). Eighteen of the 20 socio-political crises in the region were internal, which contrasts with the aggregated data at the international level, according to which approximately half the socio-political crises worldwide were internal in nature. Only the case of Ecuador was described as internationalised internal in nature and only the crisis in Venezuela-Guyana was international.

Once again, 33 socio-political crises were identified in **Asia and the Pacific**, accounting for 29% of the total worldwide. There were two new crises compared to 2022 (Afghanistan-Pakistan and China-Philippines), while the cases of India and India (Assam) stopped being considered socio-political crises. Broken down by subregion, 12 of the crises were in East Asia: China (Xinjiang); China (Tibet); China (Hong Kong); China-Philippines; China-Japan; China-Taiwan; North Korea-US, Japan and South Korea; and the South China Sea. Seven of the crises took place in South Asia: Afghanistan-Pakistan, Bangladesh, India (Manipur), India (Nagaland), India-China, India-Pakistan and Pakistan; four in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan); four in South-east Asia (Indonesia (Sulawesi), Indonesia (West Papua), Laos and Thailand; and two in the Pacific (Papua New Guinea and Fiji). As in previous years, some countries were the scene of several socio-political crises, like China (9), India (four) and Indonesia, Japan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and North Korea (three). Almost half the crises (48%) were of low intensity, 21% were of medium intensity and the remaining 30% were of high intensity. Forty-two per cent of the cases identified in Asia and the Pacific escalated in 2023 compared to the previous year, while 27% of the crises decreased in intensity. No changes were observed in the remaining 30%. There was a notable escalation in socio-political crises considered high-intensity in 2023. Afghanistan-Pakistan was considered a new socio-political crisis since tension between both countries increased throughout 2023, with some episodes of violence on the border, constant diplomatic confrontations and Pakistan's expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees. The three crises that China maintains with Japan, Taiwan and the

Philippines also became more strained. Political and military tension between China and the Philippines increased substantially during the year, with some of the most serious maritime incidents in recent years, a rise in bellicose rhetoric and the strengthening of defensive alliances between the Philippines and several countries, especially the United States. Finally, tension escalated in the Indian state of Manipur with intercommunity clashes between Meitei and Kuki groups, which led to the death of 163 people.

The most significant underlying causes of the socio-political crises in the region were opposition to the state and/or the government, which was found in 64% of the cases, followed by issues linked to the control of territory and/or resources (45%) and finally demands for self-government or identity-related aspirations (39%). Nearly half the crises were internal in nature (45%), a little less than one fifth (18%) were internationalised internal and 36% were international, making Asia and the Pacific the region with the highest proportion of international crises. Most are located in the area between the Yellow Sea and the South China Sea: the dispute between China and Japan (mainly over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands); North Korea's tension with its southern neighbour and with several other countries over its weapons programme; the crises between China and Taiwan; the dispute between China and the US, with one of its main scenarios in East Asia; the historical dispute between Russia and Japan over the Kuril Islands; and the crisis in the South China Sea involving China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam.

There were 13 socio-political crises in **Europe**, or 11% of the total. Compared to the previous year, the dispute between Russia-USA, NATO and the EU began to be analysed as a socio-political crisis. The subregion with the highest number of active cases (6) was Russia and the Caucasus, followed by South-east Europe (4) and Eastern Europe (3). In addition to the two crises in Russia and Russia (North Caucasus), and the one between Russia and the US, NATO and the EU, Russia was clearly the country most involved in disputes in the region, both in Eastern Europe (Belarus, Moldova and Moldova (Transdniestria)) and the Caucasus (Armenia-Azerbaijan, Georgia (South Ossetia) and Georgia (Abkhazia)). Türkiye was an actor in three of the crises in the region (Türkiye, Türkiye-Greece-Cyprus and, to a lesser extent, Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh)).

For yet another year, the most notable aspect of our analysis of the socio-political crises in Europe is that escalating tensions were reported in 85% of the

Almost half (48%) the cases identified in Asia and the Pacific were of low intensity, despite an observable escalation in 42% over the previous year

Europe was once again the region with the highest percentage of crises that got worse in 2023 (85%)

cases there in 2023. In only one crisis did the tension subside or de-escalate (Türkiye-Greece-Cyprus, due to the rapprochement between Ankara and Athens) or remain unchanged (Moldova (Transdniestria)), though the context in both cases was still uncertain and fragile. Therefore, Europe was once again the region with the highest percentage of cases that worsened in 2023, maintaining the dynamics of the previous year, in which 92% of the crises got worse. This deterioration was linked both to repercussions across Europe of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and to other local and regional dynamics. This escalation of tensions did not involve an increase in intensity, since 31% of the cases were of low intensity, 54% were of medium intensity and 15% were of high intensity. These percentages are similar to those reported in 2022. The two most intense socio-political crises were Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh) and Russia. In relation to the former, an Azerbaijani military offensive led to the dismantling of the self-proclaimed republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, causing its annexation by Azerbaijan and forcing the exodus of practically the entire Armenian population there. Moreover, the situation in Russia deteriorated in 2023, including a failed armed insurrection by the Wagner Group.

Opposition to the government and/or the system were causes of 69% of the crises, followed by disputes linked to identity and/or demands for self-government (62%) and for control of territory and/or resources (23%). Europe continues to be the part of the world with the highest percentage of demands linked to identity and/or self-government, double the world average of 35%. In any case, these factors are found in complex contexts of tension within broader and internationalised dynamics involving geostrategic disputes and interests of foreign actors, as is the case of Russia in relation to Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transdniestria, as well as Türkiye's influence over the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Finally, 62% of the crises were internationalised internal in nature, 31% were international and one was internal. The most significant thing about Europe's sole internal case, in Russia (North Caucasus), is the great disparity between the proportion of internal socio-political crises worldwide (an average of 49%) and in Europe (8%). Internationalised internal crises were more than twice as prevalent in Europe (62%) as in all other regions combined (28%). Thus, external dynamics and agendas were projected onto crises in Europe once again in 2023. Accentuated since the war in Ukraine, this dimension is combined with internal factors.

In the **Middle East**, 10 socio-political crises were identified, accounting for 9% of the total. Compared to the previous year, one case, Israel-Syria-Lebanon,

stopped being considered a crisis, as it escalated to an armed conflict (Israel-Hezbollah) due to the rising hostilities and the effects of the violence of the final quarter of 2023 stemming from the crisis in Gaza. Seven of the 10 identified crises took place in the Gulf and the remaining three were in the Mashreq. Most (80%) of the crises reported no significant changes over the previous year, though a relative decrease in tension was observed in two cases (20%), Iran (northwest) and Iran (Sistan Balochistan), which had witnessed higher levels of violence in 2022 as part of Tehran's crackdown on internal dissent. The intensity of the crises was similar to the previous year, with four low-intensity cases, accounting for 40% (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Iraq (Kurdistan) and Palestine (internal tension between Fatah and Hamas)), four medium-intensity cases, also representing 40% (Egypt, Iran (northwest), Iran (Sistan Balochistan) and Lebanon) and two high-intensity cases (Iran and Iran-US, Israel), making up the remaining 20%.

The crisis in Gaza also had a direct and indirect impact on the dynamics of armed conflict and tensions in the region. In the last quarter, there was a multiplication of attacks by groups of the self-proclaimed "Axis of Resistance" (made up of Hezbollah, pro-Iranian militias in Iraq and Syria, the Houthis in Yemen and others) against US forces in Iraq and Syria, as well as US attacks against these organisations and Israel's attacks against Hezbollah and Iran's positions and interests, in addition to other dynamics. Along with these repercussions, which are analysed in the chapter on armed conflicts, the consequences of the crisis in Gaza also influenced tensions over the Iranian nuclear programme.

The causes of the socio-political crises were similar to those of the previous year: 70% were related to opposition to the government or the system, 50% were linked to issues related to identity and/or self-government and only in 10% were caused by demands related to control of territory and/or resources. Finally, as in recent years, 50% of the socio-political crises were internationalised internal and 40% were internal. The sole international case (10%) was Iran-USA, Israel.

2.3. Socio-political crises: annual evolution

2.3.1. Africa

Great Lakes and Central Africa

Chad	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↓
Type:	Government, Resources, Territory, Identity Internationalised Internal
Main parties:	Transitional Military Council, political and social opposition (such as the Wakit Tama coalition, which includes the party Les Transformateurs), Chadian armed groups (mainly FACT, CCMSR, UFDD, UFR), community militias, private militias, France

Summary:
Often classified as one of the world's most vulnerable countries to climate change, Chad has faced a complex atmosphere of instability and violence for much of the period following independence in 1960. The country's ethnic diversity has cynically been exploited by a tradition of factionalism. French colonialism also exacerbated the animosity between the predominantly Muslim north and the more Christian and animist south, a politically exploited division at the heart of the conflict. Successive governments since 1966 have been confronted by insurgents seeking to gain power. Libya and France have historically been present in Chadian internal affairs, supporting insurgents and governments, respectively. Idriss Déby came to power after a coup d'état in 1990. An amendment to the Constitution in 2005 allowed him to become one of the longest-serving leaders in Africa, but it also planted the seed of an insurgency composed of disaffected people against the regime. After his death in 2021, a military junta carried out a coup d'état and installed his son, Mahamat Idriss Déby, as the new president. During 2022, Déby reached an agreement with part of the insurgency in Doha and held the National, Inclusive and Sovereign Dialogue (DNIS) that allowed him to extend his mandate beyond the initially promised 18-month transition. Meanwhile, other internal sources of instability include periodic outbreaks of inter-community violence due to cattle theft and land ownership and use, persistent insurgent attacks in the north and illegal mining. Regional tensions include antagonism between Arab tribes and black populations in the border area between Sudan and Chad, linked to local grievances, competition for resources and an extension of the war in neighbouring Sudan, as well as participation in the offensive against Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region.

Chad remained mired in instability and violence following the extension of the presidential mandate in October 2022 and the constitutional referendum held in December 2023. The 18-month transition declared by the military council in April 2021, which had seized power through a coup d'état, suspended the Constitution and installed Idriss Déby's son, Mahamat Idriss Déby, as

president after his death, was extended for 24 months. The military junta's decision triggered demonstrations and protests against them, which were broken up by the security forces, causing dozens of deaths (50 according to the government, including 10 police officers, and 100 according to the opposition, mostly civilians). The crackdown become known as Chad's "Black Thursday", 20 October 2022.[14] After this new transition period, elections are expected to be held in October 2024, in which Mahamat Déby may run. The security forces' repression, the sporadic outbreaks of violence in the north by the armed group FACT and clashes over cattle theft and land use remained constant during 2023, though less so than in 2022. In the country as a whole, 148 violent events caused 264 fatalities in 2023, according to ACLED,[15] down from the 239 violent events and 742 deaths in 2022.

The transitional government launched the organising committee for the constitutional referendum in 2013, one of the recommendations of the dialogue process (DNIS) held in 2022,[16] which took place on 17 December 2023. The referendum was boycotted by several political opposition figures and civil society leaders,[17] who complained that the draft Constitution focused on a unitary state at the expense of the federal one, that the main political actors were not involved and that the census was prepared too quickly and did not cover everyone eligible to vote, especially in the southern provinces. Prepared under the supervision of the military junta, the new Constitution was approved with low turnout, especially in the main cities and particularly the southern part of the country. On 24 December, the Electoral Commission reported that 86% of the voters approved the Constitution, with a turnout of 63.75%. Former Prime Minister Pahimi Padacké and former minister Yaya Dillo questioned the results. According to the opposition, the referendum was aimed at strengthening the powers of the president and at legitimising a more centralist state and the transition process begun after the coup d'état committed in April 2021 by making it easier for the leader of the military junta, Mahamat Déby, to run in the election scheduled for 2024.

The ratification of the new Constitution led to the renewal of the transitional government of former opposition leader Saleh Kebzabo, co-opted by the military junta,

The coup-backed president of Chad strengthened his powers through the December 2023 constitutional referendum that will allow him to run in the October 2024 election

and the appointment of former opposition leader Succès Masra as the new prime minister on 2 January 2024.[18] On 3 November, Masra had returned from exile, where he had lived since October 2022 after the crackdown on protestors that killed dozens (around 300, according to the opposition). The agreement for his return, facilitated by ECCAS, was reached in Kinshasa and includes amnesty for all members of the military and civilians involved in the violent events of 20 October 2022 and Masra's promise to support the transition process and promote reconciliation. On 5 November, the authorities released 72 members of the opposition party Les Transformateurs detained since 2022. On 19 November, Masra addressed hundreds of supporters in the capital, N'Djamena, and urged reconciliation with the military leaders. The civil opposition platform movement Wakit Tama rejected the amnesty and the leader of the party Les Démocrates spurned the agreement and urged justice for the victims of the 2022 police crackdown. Despite the amnesties and pardons, many opponents were still imprisoned as a result of the October 2022 protests. As such, Masra's acceptance of his office prompted mixed opinions among the opposition and civil society.[19] However, as highlighted by the International Crisis Group (ICG) in January 2024, Déby asserted his authority in the following days, as the new government retained key figures from the previous government, while Masra secured only three ministries for his party. In a likely attempt to tighten his control over Masra, according to the ICG, Déby appointed another figure who had left Les Transformateurs, Moustapha Masri, as the deputy chief of his civilian cabinet on 8 January 2024. The ruling Patriotic Salvation Movement party of the late President Idriss Déby nominated President Mahamat Déby as its candidate for the presidential election scheduled for 13 October 2024.

Various analysts also indicated that Déby had failed to launch the committee that was supposed to follow up on the resolutions of the Doha peace talks and was not implementing the recommendations of the national dialogue. This was repeated by one of the main signatories of the Doha agreement, the co-leader of the armed group UFR, Timan Erdimi. His brother, Tom Erdimi, was included as a minister in the transitional government. Timan Erdimi argued that the international community had to witness the non-implementation of

14. See the summary on Chad in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises), *Alert 2023! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding,* Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

15. ACLED, Dashboard [Viewed on 19 February 2024]. This figure includes five types of violent events (battles, violence against civilians, attacks with improvised explosive devices, riots and protests). If riots and protests are excluded, the number of violent events falls to 86 and the number of deaths stays roughly similar (259).

16. For more on this subject, see Royo, Josep Maria, "Claves y retos de la transición en Chad (2) esperanzas frustradas con el proceso de paz y el diálogo nacional", Escola de Cultura de Pau, *ECP Notes on conflict and peace* no. 23, December 2022; Royo, Josep Maria, "Claves y retos de la transición en Chad (1) Cambio climático, inestabilidad y conflicto", Escola de Cultura de Pau, *ECP notes on conflict and peace* no. 19, November 2022.

17. Royo, Josep Maria, "Chad, ante un referéndum constitucional que perpetúa la dinastía Déby", *Africaye,* 16 December 2023.

18. Al-Jazeera, "Former Chad opposition leader appointed as PM of transitional government", *Al-Jazeera*, 1 January 2024.

19. Africanews, "Tchad : Masra nommé Premier ministre, réactions mitigées à N'Djamena", *Africanews*, 2 January 2024.

the agreements. In June and July, Déby retired a hundred generals and promoted a similar number of young officers close to him to the rank of general (around 500 generals in the country, one of the highest figures worldwide in proportion to the size of the army). Meanwhile, the chair of the AU Commission, Chadian politician Moussa Faki, repeated that Chadian military men should not be able to run in the 2024 elections and should hand over power to civilians. In early July, the transitional government established the National Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission, in line with the Doha Agreement, as well as another commission on national reconciliation and social cohesion. On 16 October, the transitional authorities declared that the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process had begun, as noted by the UN in November.

The transitional government gave out various pardons and decreed an amnesty for those responsible for the anti-government protests of 20 October 2022 and for various political-military actors in different phases. In December 2022, the country's prosecutor's office had convicted 262 people arrested during the protests and ordered the release of another 139 people in a trial that lacked procedural guarantees, according to international standards. The trial of around 400 FACT members (Front for Change and Concord in Chad, FACT, its acronym in French) captured in April 2021 during the fighting that led to the death of President Idriss Déby took place in February 2023. The defendants were sentenced to life imprisonment. President Mahamat Déby pardoned 380 of them, as well as another 259 activists imprisoned for their participation in the October 2022 protests. FACT leader Mahamat Mahdi Ali, sentenced along with others in absentia, did not receive a pardon. In July, another 110 people were pardoned for their participation in the protests of 20 October 2022.

In August, FACT ended the unilateral ceasefire that it had upheld since April 2021 as a result of the offensive launched that month by the Libyan National Army and the Chadian Armed Forces in the Tibesti region (north). Although the government had not agreed to any ceasefire with the group, it had released hundreds of its members after the March ruling to facilitate their participation in the Doha process. The government's offensive weakened the armed group to the point that the general secretary of FACT, Mahamat Barh Béchir Kendji, surrendered to the Chadian authorities in early November along with hundreds of combatants. On 9 November, FACT accused Kendji of treason. The members of the opposition coalition Cadre Permanent de Concertation et de Réflexion (CPCR), made up of the 18 armed groups that did not sign the Doha agreement (including FACT), said they willing to negotiate with the transitional authorities with the support of neutral and impartial mediators, but the transitional government did not respond.

At the regional level, bilateral relations between Chad and Sudan deteriorated due to accusations by the Sudanese Army and Sudan's foreign minister that Chad was helping the United Arab Emirates to support the Sudanese paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces. As the UN mission in Mali (MINUSMA) came to an end, Chad recalled its contingent to the mission. On 6 December, Mauritania and Chad, the last two members of the G5 Sahel mission, an alliance created in 2014 to confront jihadism and other challenges in the subregion, announced its imminent dissolution following previous announcements of the withdrawal of Niger and Burkina Faso. In September, a French soldier's killing of a Chadian soldier at the French military base in the town of Faya, in the province of Borkou, sparked social protests demanding the withdrawal of French troops from the country. The authorities established a joint French-Chadian commission of inquiry. These protests increased in hostility towards the French, leading in October to a letter from 20 leaders of political parties and local and diaspora social organisations, including the Wakit Tama platform, demanding that Déby withdraw French troops from Chad.

DRC	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government led by the Union Sacrée coalition (led by Félix Tshisekedi and made up of different political actors, including dissidents from the Front Commun pour le Congo, the coalition of former President Joseph Kabila), political opposition (including the Front Commun pour le Congo and Lamuka) and social opposition

Summary:
The DRC is immersed in a cycle of instability and violence that has its origins in colonial times under the tutelage first of Belgian King Leopold II and later of Belgium. The country did not escape the international dynamics of the Cold War, so the crisis persisted after its independence in 1965, following the coup d'état and subsequent dictatorship of Mobutu Sese Seko (1965-1997). It was also affected by the regional dynamics of conflict in neighbouring countries during the 1980s and 1990s, especially the 1994 Rwandan genocide and its interference in the DRC. The 1996 Rwandan-backed rebellion against the Mobutu regime led to the fall of the regime in 1997, followed by the "First African World War" (1998-2003) in which a dozen countries in the region participated. The transition between 2003 and 2006 helped to secure Joseph Kabila in power, who through control of the state apparatus, fraud and irregularities in the 2006 and 2011 elections, managed to prolong his 2016 term (when a new election was to be held) to 2018. The deep and persistent crisis affecting the country combines frustrated promises of democratisation, a high climate of corruption and patronage, omnipresent poverty and chronic violence. Control of the government is exercised through the recurrent excessive use of force and serious violations of human rights by the security forces. In 2018, new elections were held that marked the first peaceful

transition in the country and led to the controversial rise to power of Félix Tshisekedi, son of the historical opposition Étienne Tshisekedi, through a fragile coalition in which the supporters of Joseph Kabila (the FCC coalition) continued to exert their determining influence. This climate of political instability coexists with the ongoing conflict in eastern DRC, affected by local, regional and international dynamics. The coalition collapsed at the end of 2020, opening a new stage of change while political instability and violence continued in the east of the country.

The situation in the DRC got worse in 2023 as a consequence of the political violence linked to the elections, in addition to the escalation of violence in the different scenarios of conflict. First, starting in October, the armed group March 23 Movement (M23) intensified its attacks in North Kivu.[20] This escalation in the final quarter of the year, in addition to attacks by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)[21] and other groups in the provinces of Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu, contributed to a lingering general atmosphere of insecurity. This was made worse with the political violence linked to the election campaign that ended in the general elections on 20 December. Finally, the armed conflict that began in mid-2022 in the territory of Kwamouth, in the province of Mai-Ndombe (west of the country), intensified in 2023 and spread to the neighbouring provinces of Kwango, Kwilu, Kinshasa and Kongo Central, claiming hundreds of lives.[22]

The situation in the DRC worsened during 2023 as a consequence of the escalation of violence in the different fronts opened in the country, in addition to the political violence linked to the elections

On 20 December, general elections were held in the DRC, in which President Félix Tshisekedi was re-elected for a second term after receiving more than 73% of the votes with 43% turnout, according to the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), a result ratified by the Constitutional Court. President Félix Tshisekedi was the favourite to win the election, as the opposition was fragmented. He took office in 2019 after a disputed election that, according to various sources, may have been won by another candidate, Martin Fayulu. The 2023 elections were plagued by irregularities, according to many analysts and the Congolese Episcopal Conference, and several of the main candidates called for a rerun and denounced fraud, including Moïse Katumbi, Martin Fayulu, Denis Mukwege and the party of former President Joseph Kabila.[23] Logistical problems, allegations of fraud, non-transparent vote counting, faulty equipment and delays in the delivery of election materials forced an unscheduled extension of the election, which opposition

leaders said was unconstitutional. The Catholic and Protestant Churches of the DRC, which acted as local observers of the elections, reported that the many cases of irregularities found could affect the integrity of the results. The government ruled out a repeat election and banned opposition protests in the days after the elections. The provisional results of the legislative elections were published by the CENI on 14 January. Félix Tshisekedi's party, the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS), was declared the winner, taking 66 of the 500 seats, increasing the result obtained in 2018 (35 seats). The UDPS is expected to form a new government with the rest of the allied parties of the Union Sacrée coalition, which in the outgoing Parliament controlled 390 seats. The parties of some Tshisekedi allies, such as that of Senate President Modeste Bahati Lukwebo, Defence Minister Jean Pierre Bemba and Economy Minister Vital Kamerhe, won 35, 17 and 32 seats, respectively. This serious post-election situation caused a dispute that threatens to destabilise the country and the region.

In the run-up to the elections, human rights groups had accused the authorities of restricting political space and the UN documented violence against civil society activists.[24] Since October, organisations like Human Rights Watch have warned of clashes across the country between supporters of rival political parties that have resulted in assaults and sexual violence.[25] These incidents of political violence continued after the elections. Supporters of the ruling UDPS party were involved in threats and attacks against opposition leaders and journalists. Opposition supporters were also involved in violence. Fighting between security forces and their allies and the M23 in the east of the country also prevented 1.5 million internally displaced people from registering to vote.

Security in the east deteriorated during Tshisekedi's government[26] and by the end of 2023 there was a record number of seven million internally displaced people.[27] Although the government and the M23 engaged in less fighting between April and October, after the East African Community (EAC) military mission, which began in November 2022, completed its deployment in the first quarter, the M23 continued fighting local pro-government armed groups for control of territory in North Kivu province. However, in October the M23 intensified its offensive in North Kivu, with support from Rwanda.[28]

20. See the summary on DRC (east) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).
21. See the summary on DRC (east-ADF) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).
22. See the summary on DRC (west) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).
23. Kombi, Yassin and Rolley, Sonia, Congo's Katumbi says election should be annulled as opposition plans protest, *Reuters*, 23 December 2023.
24. Security Council Report, "Democratic Republic of the Congo: Briefing and Consultations", *SCR*, 27 27 September 2023.
25. Human Rights Watch, "DR Congo: Electoral Violence Threatens Vote", *HRW,* 16 December 2023.
26. The News Humanitarian, "Gaza's historic toll, DR Congo elections, and a city falls in Sudan: The Cheat Sheet", 22 December 2023.
27. IOM, "Record High Displacement in DRC at Nearly 7 Million", *IOM*, 30 October 2023.
28. See the summary on DRC (east) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts) of this report and in chapter 2 (Peace negotiations in Africa). Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

The EAC mission completed its withdrawal from the country on 21 December at the government's request due to its ineffectiveness. There were also talks between the Congolese government and South Africa, which began in March, and culminated in the deployment of a SADC force in the area to cooperate in FARDC combat operations against the M23. In May, the deployment of the SADC mission in the DRC (SAMIDRC) was approved by the SADC and became effective on 15 December 2023. At the start of 2024, MONUSCO completed the first phase of its withdrawal, with 2,000 peacekeepers leaving the country.

Uganda	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, ADF

Summary:

President Yoweri Museveni has been in power since 1986, when an insurgent movement he commanded succeeded in overthrowing the government of Milton Obote, and has since ruled the country using authoritarian means and a political system controlled by the former rebel movement, the NRM (the Movement). In the 2001 presidential elections Museveni defeated his main opponent, Kizza Besigye, a former colonel in the NRM, amid allegations of fraud. In a referendum held in July 2005 Ugandans voted to return to a multiparty system. Following an amendment to the Constitution in 2005 to increase the existing limit of two consecutive terms to three, Museveni won the 2006 elections, amid serious allegations of fraud. They were the first multiparty elections that had been held since he had come to power in 1986. In 2011 and 2016 presidential elections, Museveni again beat his eternal rival and former ally Kizza Besigye amid new allegations of fraud, which has led to an escalation of social tension and Government repression of the demands for democratic change and protests against the rising cost of living. In 2021, he won re-election again, this time against young new opposition leader Robert Kyagulanyi, known popularly as Bobi Wine. In parallel, Uganda's military intervention in Somalia and the DRC (east) increased the threats of the Somali armed group al-Shabaab and of the armed Ugandan group based in the DRC, the ADF, against Uganda. Finally, various parts of the country are affected by periodic intercommunity disputes and grievances exploited during the electoral period.

The year was marked by persistent strain between the government and the political opposition, the rise in insecurity caused by the attacks by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and the enactment of a law that criminalises and persecutes the LGTBIQ+ community. Political tensions between the government of Yoweri Museveni and the political opposition intensified in the last quarter of the year after the government restricted the right of assembly of the main opposition party, the National Unity Platform (NUP). This happened after the NUP announced the start of a nationwide campaign tour called the "march of a million". Later, on 5 October, police arrested its leader, Robert Kyagulanyi, known as Bobi Wine, at Entebbe Airport while returning from a trip abroad. In response, on 26 October, the opposition walked out of Parliament for the third time in two weeks, demanding a debate on human rights and an end to the repression of opposition parties, leading to a shutdown of Parliament until December.

Beyond the political crisis, Uganda also had to face a deteriorating security situation due to the increase in ADF armed actions and violence caused by cattle theft in the northern and eastern regions of the country, including the border with Kenya. **Due to the insecurity caused by the ADF and the instability in the neighbouring DRC,**[29] in February the military chiefs of the East African Community (EAC) agreed that Uganda could deploy troops to North Kivu province (eastern DRC) to fight alongside Kenyan forces against the M23 and other rebel groups like the ADF. In late March, around 1,000 Ugandan soldiers were deployed to the town of Bunagana in North Kivu province. In mid-June, suspected ADF members attacked a secondary school in the town of Mpondwe, near the DRC border, killing at least 44 people, mostly children. In response, the Ugandan and Congolese Armed Forces intensified operations against the ADF in the Mwalika Valley, Beni Territory (North Kivu), reportedly killing 16 fighters, including several leaders of the group. Later, on October 13, suspected ADF members ambushed a civilian vehicle in Katojo, near the DRC border, killing two people. Days later, they killed two foreign tourists and their local guide in Queen Elizabeth National Park. While the government announced an amnesty for ADF members willing to surrender on 25 October, in December the ADF stepped up its attacks on Ugandan soil, carrying out two bomb attacks in Kampala that injured one person, and an attack in Kitehurizi village, Kamwenge district, in which 10 civilians were killed and hundreds displaced from their homes.

In the Karamoja region, bordering Kenya and South Sudan, attacks by alleged cattle thieves continued throughout the year, leaving dozens dead. On 11 May, the Ugandan Army deployed additional troops to Karamoja in a bid to contain **cattle theft and violence** between herders and farmers. In mid-May, President Yoweri K. Museveni issued an executive order banning Kenyan Turkana herders from entering Uganda, as they are accused of many cases of cattle theft and murder on Ugandan soil.

Finally, in February, the government announced the closure of the OHCHR office in Uganda despite criticism from Ugandan activists and human rights groups, particularly the Human Rights Awareness and

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29. For further information, see the summary on DRC (ADF-east) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).

Promotion Forum. On 21 March, Parliament almost unanimously approved **a draft bill criminalising sexual relations between people of the same sex**, which was ratified and signed into law by President Museveni in late May, provoking widespread international condemnation. In particular, US President Joe Biden deplored the bill as a "tragic violation" of human rights, announcing visa restrictions on people who "undermine the democratic process" in Uganda and excluding the country from the African trade initiative for human rights violations. Ugandan human rights groups urged the World Bank (WB) to suspend its loans to Uganda. On 8 August, it announced a freeze on new loans to Uganda, causing the Ugandan shilling to fall to its lowest level against the US dollar in nearly eight years.

Horn of Africa

Eritrea - Ethiopia	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Territory International
Main parties:	Eritrea, Ethiopia

Summary:
Eritrea became independent from Ethiopia in 1993, although the border between both countries was not clearly defined, causing them to face off between 1998 and 2000 in a war that cost over 100,000 lives. In June 2000 they signed a cessation of hostilities agreement, the UN Security Council established the UNMEE mission to monitor it and they signed the Algiers peace agreement in December. This agreement established that both would submit to the ruling issued by the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC), which is in charge of delimiting and demarcating the border based on the relevant colonial treaties (1900, 1902 and 1908) and on international law. The EEBC announced its opinion in April 2002, assigning the disputed border village of Badme (the epicentre of the war, currently administered by Ethiopia) to Eritrea, though Ethiopia rejected the decision. Frustrated by the lack of progress in implementing the EEBC's ruling due to insufficient pressure on Ethiopia to comply, Eritrea decided to restrict UNMEE operations in late 2005, forcing its withdrawal in 2008. A year earlier, the EEBC had ended its work without being able to implement its mandate due to obstructions in Ethiopia. Tensions have remained high since then, with thousands of soldiers on the common border, sporadic clashes and belligerent rhetoric. In 2018, a historic agreement was reached between both governments, beginning the re-establishment of diplomatic relations, with flights resuming and their borders reopening. However, the initial optimism soon faded, and a few months later the border was closed again and many issues remained unresolved. The war between Ethiopia and the political and military authorities of Tigray from 2020 to 2022 brought the former enemies together in an alliance to fight the TPLF, but old grievances and new disputes could threaten to renew the conflict between them.

Five years after the historic peace agreement was signed by Eritrea and Ethiopia, the war between Ethiopia and the political and military authorities of Tigray between 2020 and 2022 helped the erstwhile enemies to ally to fight against the TPLF, but old grievances and new disputes could threaten to revive the conflict, according to various analysts. The fact that neither the Amhara militias nor the Eritrean militias participated in the South Africa agreement of November 2022 between Ethiopia and the TPLF, and that both had wanted to eliminate TPLF resistance instead of reaching an agreement, among other issues, increased tension between the two.[30] The 2018 agreement led to the reestablishment of diplomatic relations, the resumption of flights and the reopening of their borders. The initial optimism waned after a few months when the border was closed again and many issues remained unresolved. During the year, troop movements on the shared border and the lack of meetings between the parties, in addition to possible Eritrean support for the Amhara Faro militias and the Oromo insurgent group OLA, which is fighting against the Ethiopian security forces, raised alarms.[31] Meanwhile, although the practical withdrawal of Eritrean troops from Ethiopian territory had been announced, various analysts also warned of Eritrean troops in Ethiopian towns near their common border.

Eritrean military sources[32] suggested that their country was ready for a possible war. According to analysts, Ethiopia built up troops near the Eritrean border in the Ethiopian town of Zalambessa, which is 100 miles from the Eritrean capital, Asmara, and close to the border with the Southern Red Sea Region, which includes the Eritrean port of Assab. The port is only 45 miles from the Ethiopian border and could be difficult for Eritrea to defend. Those areas recently witnessed greater air activity and troop movements.

Tensions rose in October, when Abiy asserted Ethiopia's "right" to access to the sea, emphasising its historical claims to the Red Sea coast.[33] Regional leaders saw Abiy's comments, which he had long expressed privately, as an implicit threat to seize part of Eritrea, whose secession from Ethiopia in 1991 left the latter landlocked. Their growing mistrust and the mobilisation of forces and accumulation of weapons in the border area created a climate of concern. The agreement in early 2024 between Ethiopia and Somaliland on possible Ethiopian access to the coast of this region disputed with Somalia showed that Ethiopia remained committed to maximising its strategic interests at the cost of worsening relations with its neighbours.[34] The agreement could help to lower Ethiopian interest in Eritrean ports.

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30. Kheir Omer, Mohammed, "How Eritrea Could Derail the Ethiopian Peace Deal", *Foreign Policy,* 10 November 2022.
31. Kheir Omer, Mohammed, "Are Ethiopia and Eritrea on the Path to War?", *Foreign Policy,* 7 November 2023.
32. Ibid.
33. The Economist, "Ethiopia's prime minister wants a Red Sea harbour", *The Economist,* 2 November 2023.
34. See the summary on Ethiopia-Somalia in this chapter.

Ethiopia	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, various armed groups

Summary:

The Ethiopian administration that has governed since 1991 is facing a series of opposition movements that demand advances in the democracy and governability of the country, as well as a greater degree of self-government. The government coalition EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) is controlled by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) party, of the Tigrayan minority, that rules the country with growing authoritarianism with the consent of the Amhara elite. There is discontent in the country with the ethnic federal regime implemented by the EPRDF which has not resolved the national issue and has led to the consolidation of a strong political and social opposition. Along with the demands for the democratization of the institutions, there are political-military sectors that believe that ethnic federalism does not meet their nationalist demands and other sectors, from the ruling classes and present throughout the country, that consider ethnic federalism to be a deterrent to the consolidation of the Nation-State. In the 2005 elections this diverse opposition proved to be a challenge for the EPRDF, who was reluctant to accept genuine multi-party competition, and post-election protests were violently repressed. The following elections (2010, 2015) further limited democratic openness by increasing the verticality of the regime and the repression of the political opposition. The 2009 Counter-Terrorism Act helped decimate the opposition. The attempt since 2014 to carry out the Addis Ababa Master Plan, a plan that provided for the territorial expansion of the capital, Addis Ababa, at the expense of several cities in the Oromiya region, and the organization of the development of the city generated significant protests and deadly repression in the Oromiya region, which contributed to increased tension. Social protests contributed to the resignation of Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn in early 2018 and the appointment of Abiy Ahmed, who undertook a series of reforms –including dissolving the EPRDF coalition and refounding it in December 2019 into a new national party, the Prosperity Party (PP), which shunned ethnic federalism, making the TPLF not want to join– aimed at easing ethnic tensions in the country, promoting national unity and relaxing restrictions on civil liberties. However, the changes introduced by the government of Abiy Ahmed caused tension in the federation, especially between the federal government controlled by the PP and the TPLF, which culminated in a war (2020-2022) in which Eritrea and the militias of the Amhara region supported the federal government.The agreement between the government and the TPLF that ended the war did not include Eritrea and the Amhara militias. When they were forced to lay down their arms, these militias rebelled, starting a new conflict. Other political and military movements, such as the Oromo armed group OLA, question Abiy Ahmed's plans for the country.

Additional sources of tension were linked to Ethiopia's regional hegemony and defence of its national interests, such as its competition for water resources with its neighbours Egypt and Sudan and its diversification of access to the sea via its neighbours Djibouti, Eritrea and Somaliland.

Ethiopia was still affected by many challenges and sources of internal and regional instability and violence.[35] The internal challenges stem from the **consequences of the war in the Tigray region**, one of the most serious in recent years in terms of fatalities, forced displacement and sexual violence. The Ethiopian federal government and the Tigrayan political and military movement continued to implement the November 2022 peace agreement during the year, despite the many open challenges it faced, the fragility of the situation, human rights violations and the famine desolating the region.[36] Moreover, **the situation in the Oromia region continued to be extremely serious in 2023**, with persistent clashes and attacks by the armed group Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) and counterinsurgency activity by the federal security forces.[37] In April 2023, the federal security forces lost the support of the Amhara Fano militias to combat the OLA after the federal government announced that all special forces across the country, especially the Amhara special forces and Amhara Fano militias, had to disarm, disband and integrate into the Ethiopian Army and police. The militias refused, triggering escalating clashes between them and the federal security forces. The Amhara militias mostly retreated to the Amhara region, where they began a guerrilla war against the federal government. Since then, there have been spikes of violence, repression and clashes between the federal security forces and these militias, who were joined by part of the regional security forces who deserted their posts.[38] Dissident groups from the Benishangul-Gumuz region opposed the 2022 agreement to disarm the Gumuz People's Democratic Movement, which led to an uptick in secessionist groups' attacks and counterinsurgency operations by the security forces in Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella and other regions. The federal government continued to deal with demands and demonstrations from political and military actors linked to Ethiopia's more than 80 ethnic groups.

In regional developments, **Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan** agreed to resume talks to reach an agreement on the dispute over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), but no progress was made in the different rounds of negotiations held during the year and Ethiopia filled the dam despite opposition from its neighbours Egypt and Sudan.[39] Finally, a memorandum of understanding reached between Ethiopia and Somaliland triggered a serious diplomatic crisis between Somaliland and

35. See the summary on Eritrea-Ethiopia and Ethiopia-Somalia in this chapter.
36. See the summary on Ethiopia (Tigray) in chapter 2 (Peace negotiations in Africa). Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.
37. See the summary on Ethiopia (Oromia) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).
38. See the summary on Ethiopia (Amhara) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).
39. See the summary on Ethiopia-Egypt-Sudan in chapter 2 (Peace negotiations in Africa). Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

Somalia and particularly an escalation of tension between **Ethiopia and Somalia** that could have regional consequences.[40] There was a gradual deterioration in relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia, countries that signed a historic peace agreement five years ago and that just two years ago were cooperating in the armed conflict against the TPLF, a political and military movement in the Tigray region. The end of the war and Eritrea's marginalisation in the peace agreement between the TPLF and the Ethiopian federal government could threaten to bring the two countries into conflict again, according to various analysts.[41]

Ethiopia-Somalia	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government, Territory, Resources International
Main parties:	Ethiopia, Somalia, Somaliland

Summary:

The conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia dates back to the 14th century, when the rulers of the Christian highlands of Ethiopia carried out military expeditions in the coast where Islam dominated, particularly in what is now northern Somalia, to open commercial routes giving them access to the sea. Later, in the late 19th century, Ethiopian Emperor Menelik II conquered the Somali city of Harar and announced an ambitious expansion programme in 1891. After the First Italo-Ethiopian War (1895-1896), in which it defeated colonial Italy, Ethiopia won recognition of its independence from the colonial powers. In response to Menelik's expansionist threat, many clans in what became British Somaliland accepted British protection. After Ethiopia's defeat in the Second Italo-Ethiopian War by Mussolini's Italy and due to Ethiopian positioning in the Second World War, in the late 1940s Ethiopia arranged for the British Empire to give it the Somali region of Ogaden, to the dismay of the Somalis. After Somalia's independence in 1960, both countries fought several wars (1964, 1977-1978, 1982) in which Somalia was defeated. The Somali Civil War of the late 1980s and the collapse of Somalia in 1991 put Ethiopia at a clear military and economic advantage and made Somalia a national security issue for Ethiopia. As such, Addis Abeba intervened in Somali internal affairs to promote peace and security in Somalia in defence of its own interests, which do not always align with Somali interests. Ethiopia supported some political and military actors at the expense of others, upheld a permanent unilateral and non-public military presence and later participated in multilateral frameworks (AMISOM and currently ATMIS), which the Somali armed group al-Shabaab has used to partly justify its armed campaign.

The signing of a memorandum of understanding[42] between Ethiopia and Somaliland on 1 January 2024 set off a serious diplomatic crisis between both administrations and Somalia and especially escalated tension between Ethiopia and Somalia that could have regional consequences. This agreement would give land-locked Ethiopia the chance to acquire a permanent naval base and commercial maritime service in the Gulf of Aden through an agreement to lease a 20-kilometre stretch of coastline for 50 years, as detailed by the authorities of Ethiopia and Somaliland. In exchange, according to Somaliland's President Muse Bihi Abdi, Ethiopia would internationally recognise his region as an independent country. Addis Abeba clarified that it still had to evaluate that request and promised "an in-depth evaluation".[43] According to various analysts, the agreement could revolve around the port of Lugaya, near the border with Djibouti, or the port of Berbera, which was recently expanded by the UAE-based port logistics company DP World. Ethiopia has historically sought to diversify its access to the sea, as 95% of its trade goes through Djibouti. Tensions between Ethiopia and Djibouti, in part due to Ethiopian complaints about Djibouti's port fees and excessive bureaucracy, may have influenced Abiy Ahmed's calculations to promote the agreement. The deal also includes leasing land from Somaliland to build a naval base. In exchange, Somaliland would receive the equivalent value in the form of shares in Ethiopian Airlines. The Ethiopian prime minister's office hailed the agreement, but it made no mention of recognising Somaliland's independence. It did however commit to advancing their mutual interests on the basis of reciprocity.

Somalia declared the agreement void and even threatened Ethiopia with starting a war to preserve its national sovereignty if necessary, as Somalia continues to consider Somaliland part of Somalia, despite its de facto independence in 1991, which has never been internationally recognised. Demonstrations against the agreement were staged in Somalia. In Somaliland itself, the agreement was met with protests and the defence minister resigned. The United States and the EU, AU, IGAD, Arab League and other bodies called for dialogue and to reduce tension. The regional organisation IGAD, through the government of Djibouti, which holds the rotating presidency, urgently convened an extraordinary meeting on 18 January 2024 to address the diplomatic tensions. Ethiopia announced that it would not be able to attend the meeting because it overlapped with the 19th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). According to various analysts,[44] although a confrontation between both countries is unlikely due to Ethiopia's superior military strength, the agreement could seriously harm their relations and have consequences in the war against the Somali Islamist armed group al-Shabaab. Somalia's

40. See the summary on Ethiopia-Somalia in this chapter.
41. See the summary on Eritrea-Ethiopia in this chapter.
42. Faisal, Ali, "Ethiopia and Somaliland reach agreement over access to ports", *The Guardian*, 1 January 2024.
43. Ehl, David, "Polémico acuerdo: salida al mar a cambio de reconocimiento", *DW*, 4 January 2024.
44. Weldemariam, Alemayehu, "Ethiopia's deal with Somaliland upends regional dynamics, risking strife across the Horn of Africa", *The Conversation*, 13 January 2024.

pushback against Ethiopia could raise questions about Ethiopian troops in the AU mission in Somalia (ATMIS), to which Ethiopia is one of the main contributing countries.

Kenya	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government, System, Resources, Identity, Self-Government Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, ethnic militias, political and social opposition (political parties, civil society organisations), SLDF armed group, Mungiki sect, MRC party, Somali armed group al-Shabaab and al-Shabaab sympathizers in Kenya, ISIS

Summary:
Kenya's politics and economy have been dominated since its independence in 1963 by the KANU party, controlled by the largest community in the country, the Kikuyu, to the detriment of the remaining ethnic groups. The father of independence and founder of KANU, Jomo Kenyatta, ruled the country from 1964 until his death in 1978 and was succeeded by the autocratic Daniel Arap Moi. In 1991, Moi began a transition towards the end of single-party rule and in 1992 the first multi-party elections were held, which KANU also won. Starting in 2002, the client process to succeed the autocratic Daniel Arap Moi (in power for 24 years) was interrupted by the victory of Mwai Kibaki, which together with KANU dissidents and others created the National Alliance of Rainbow Coalition (NARC) and defeated Uhuru Kenyatta, the son of the independence leader and official KANU candidate. Since then, different ethno-political conflicts have emerged in the country, which has produced a climate of political violence instrumentalized during the different electoral cycles. The electoral fraud that took place in 2007 sparked an outbreak of violence in which 1,300 people died and some 300,000 were displaced. After this election, a fragile national unity government was formed between Mwai Kibabi and Raila Odinga (the son of historical opposition leader Oginga Odinga). Uhuru Kenyatta was elected president in 2013 and William Ruto became vice president, though the results were challenged by the opposition led by Raila Odinga, just like in 2017, when Kenyatta won re-election. Ruto and Odinga faced off in the 2022 election, also affected by irregularities in a climate of political violence, as in previous elections. In the end, Ruto was declared the winner. In parallel, several areas of the country were affected by inter-community disputes over land ownership and cattle theft, also instigated politically during the electoral period. In addition, Kenya's military intervention in Somalia triggered attacks by the Somali armed group al-Shabaab in Kenya, subsequent animosity towards the Somali population in Kenya and tensions between Kenya and Somalia over their different political agendas, posing added challenges to the stability of the country.

The situation in the country was marked by persistent attacks by the Somali armed group al-Shabaab in the east and northeast, as well as intercommunity violence and crime, mainly in the north and the central north, linked to structural disputes over livestock theft and land use and ownership aggravated by extreme drought and floods resulting from the consequences of climate change. The government announced that floods linked to the El Niño climate phenomenon may have caused the deaths of 120 people and displaced tens of thousands between October and late November.[45]

According to ACLED,[46] there were 147 violent events (battles, violence against civilians and improvised explosive devices) in the four counties bordering Somalia (Mandera, Wajir, Garissa and Lamu), where most acts of violence linked to the armed jihadist group al-Shabaab take place, costing the lives of 297 people in 2023. The situation was worse than the previous year, when 109 violent events led to 170 fatalities in the four border counties. Al-Shabaab was less active at the start of the year, though by April it resumed attacking at the intensity of previous years. In September, the US and Kenya signed a military cooperation agreement to deal with al-Shabaab in the country and collaborate on other national and international aspects of mutual interest. In October, the United States issued a warning about possible imminent attacks by the armed group in the capital. If statistics on inter-community violence (mainly, but not exclusively, in the centre and north of the country) and other forms of violence in the country as a whole are added to al-Shabaab's numbers, 541 violent events took place in Kenya in 2023, causing 741 fatalities. In 2022, there were 440 events and a death toll of 482 in the country as a whole.[47] The most notable inter-community disputes of the year included cross-border clashes between the counties of Kericho and Kisumu, which claimed dozens of lives and prompted police intervention, and disputes in other counties of a more structural nature, such as in Turkana, Marsabit, Samburu and Isiolo.

The opposition staged major demonstrations and protests against the government at different times of the year. Several people died and hundreds were arrested in the police crackdown. The previous discussion and subsequent approval in June of the 2023 finance bill, which doubled the fuel tax, increased corn prices and introduced a new housing tax, eliminating previous subsidies, sparked large demonstrations and protests throughout the year. Opposition leader Raila Odinga's party, the Azimio la Umoja coalition, called for total rejection of the new legislation. The government claimed that it had to hike tax rates to stabilise the economy due

45. Reuters, "Death toll from Kenya's El Nino floods jumps to 120", *Reuters*, 28 November 2023.
46. ACLED, online [Viewed on 15 February 2024].
47. If the violence linked to protests and demonstrations with riots is added to this figures in 2023, the number of violent events reached 2,248, with 1,011 fatalities, more than the 1,660 events and 698 fatalities in 2022.

to the serious volatility of international developments. In December, Secretary of the Treasury Njuguna Ndun'gu admitted that the government had been unable to pay civil servants for five months. Meanwhile, the Kenya Kwanza alliance, President William Ruto's ruling party, and the main opposition coalition, Azimio la Umoja, maintained bilateral contacts during the year until they agreed in August to create the National Dialogue Committee (NDC) to address various disagreements and deadlock between them, including the high cost of living in the country and the results of the 2022 elections. The NDC started to meet with other political parties and civil society groups in September and in late November it published a report with recommendations that included calls for restructuring and reconstituting the electoral commission, auditing the last presidential election, reviewing tax policy, streamlining public spending, expanding social protection and reducing the cost of living. The government welcomed the recommendations. However, on 28 November the High Court ruled that the salary tax introduced by Ruto in June was illegal, dealing a blow to the government's efforts to increase tax revenue, and one of Azimio la Umoja's leaders, Kalonzo Musyoka, celebrated what he described as the opposition coalition's victory.

Finally, Nairobi withdrew its troops from the DRC as part of its participation in the EAC mission and was preparing to deploy troops to Haiti,[48] though this issue was still pending acceptance by the Supreme Court of Kenya at the end of the year.

North Africa – Maghreb

Tunisia	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government, System Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, jihadist armed groups

Summary:
Since its independence in 1956 and until early 2011, Tunisia was governed by only two presidents. For three decades, Habib Bourghiba laid the foundations of the authoritarian regime in the country, which was later continued by Zine el Abidine Ben Ali after a coup d'état in 1987. The concentration of power, the persecution of the secular and Islamist political opposition and the ironclad social control that characterised the country's internal situation contrasted with its international image of stability. Despite allegations of corruption, electoral fraud and human rights violations, Tunisia established itself for years as a privileged ally of the West. In December 2010, the outbreak of a popular revolt exposed cracks in Ben Ali's government, leading to its downfall early 2011, and inspired demonstrations against authoritarian governments throughout the Arab world. Since then, Tunisia has been navigating a rocky transition process clearly showing tensions between the secular and Islamist groups in the country. At the same time, Tunisia has been the scene of armed group activity, including branches of AQIM and ISIS. Since mid-2021, Tunisia has been immersed in a new crisis characterised by President Kais Saïed's attempts to accumulate power.

The authoritarian bent of President Kais Saïed and government's repression of critics intensified in 2023 alongside worrying attacks against the sub-Saharan migrant population. In line with behaviour observed since mid-2021, throughout the year Saïed continued to accumulate power and reduce the mechanisms for the balance of powers and control of the executive branch. Following the second round of legislative elections in January, a new Parliament was established in March amid criticism from the main opposition coalition. The National Salvation Front (FSN) did not recognise the legitimacy of the new legislature, which emerged from the elections with a turnout of 11% and which, according to some, has much fewer powers as established in the Constitution promoted by Saïed himself and adopted in 2022. Also in March, the Tunisian president unilaterally decided to dissolve the democratically elected municipal councils and replace them with new local authorities, chosen with new rules. These local elections held their first round in December and also had a very low turnout (11%) amid calls for a boycott. The second was scheduled for February 2024. Opposition figures and intellectuals argued that this vote would only help to entrench the repressive system in the country. Throughout the year, there was a constant stream of legal action, arrests and convictions against representatives of the opposition and other critics, businessmen and journalists. Top members of the Islamist-inspired party Ennahda were especially targeted by the campaign. Its leader, **Rachid Ghannouchi, was arrested in April after warning that the persecution of Islamist forces could lead to a civil war. In May, Ghannouchi was sentenced to a year in prison on terrorism charges**. Tunisian authorities ordered the closure of Ennahda's central office and several regional offices, in what was seen as an unofficial ban on the party. The actions taken against the opposition were deplored by Tunisian civil society organisations and international actors, including the OHCHR, which demanded the release of people arbitrarily detained in the North African country. Throughout the year, demonstrations took place to demand the release of detained people and to protest against the anti-democratic drift, the rise in the cost of living and the deterioration of the socio-economic situation, which at the end of the year was reflected in the lack of basic products and tensions in some areas of the country.

Another notable dynamic of tension in the country was related to the situation of the black migrant, refugee

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or asylum-seeking population, which suffered from more persecution and attacks, especially after some controversial statements made by Saïed. In February, **the Tunisian president said that the flow of sub-Saharan migrants was part of a "criminal plan" aimed at changing the demographic composition of the country and linked the migrant population to violence and crime**.[49] Saïed's comments were rejected by actors inside and outside Tunisia, including the African Union, which was "concerned and dismayed by the form and substance of the statements". Local and international human rights organisations and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination also complained of racism. The president's statements were followed by a wave of arrests, involving more than 800 migrants in February alone, and **violent attacks intensified in the following months, leaving around 30 people dead and dozens wounded**. The most violent incidents occurred in Sfax, a town that was the scene of protests against the migrant population and fighting until the end of the year. Two young sub-Saharans died there, one in May and another in July. At the same time, there were mass expulsions of sub-Saharan migrants (more than 2,000 of 16 nationalities) to remote areas bordering Algeria and Libya where two and 28 people died, respectively, some of hunger and thirst, according to the OHCHR.[50] Other sources raised the number of expulsions to 4,000 and the death toll to between 50 and 70.[52]UN experts urged the Tunisian authorities to stop the deportations, reminded them that mass expulsions are prohibited by international law and warned of the rise in racist and hate speech in the country. In August, the UN Secretary-General demanded that the deported population be relocated to safe places. Despite these controversial actions against the migrant population, the EU signed a memorandum of understanding with the Tunisian government in the middle of the year to intensify border controls and stop the flows of people to Europe. The agreement drew criticism of the EU from various sides, including from the European Parliament and organisations such as HRW, which argued that it did not include guarantees of the human rights of migrants and asylum seekers or provisions to prevent European aid from reaching groups responsible for violations.[53] In October, Saïed returned the money he had received from the EU under this agreement. During the last quarter of 2023, the crisis in Gaza also had an echo in Tunisia, where protesters attacked a Jewish facility (in October) and a legal initiative was launched to criminalise the normalisation of relations with Israel that failed after Saïed objected. According to reports, the Tunisian government was pressured by the US to stop the initiative. Finally, limited armed group activity was reported in 2023.

In December, the Tunisian authorities reported the death of three people they identified as "terrorists" in the Kasserine area. In May, a violent incident at a synagogue left five people dead, but the authorities called it a crime and not an act of terrorism. **Some analysts highlighted the decline of jihadist activity in North Africa, including in Tunisia, in contrast to the recent increased activity of jihadist groups in sub-Saharan Africa**.[53] The AQIM branch in Tunisia has not claimed responsibility for an attack since 2019 and reports indicate that attacks by jihadist groups in Tunisia (by ISIS, AQIM or other actors) dropped from 47 in 2017 to only four in 2022. None of these last four attacks were attributed to any group. Specialists warn, however, that the deterioration of the political and socio-economic situation in the country could result in greater future activity among these types of organisations.

West Africa

Guinea	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, Armed Forces, opposition political parties, unions

Summary:
The army took advantage of the death of President Lansana Conté in December 2008, after more than two decades in power, to carry out a new coup d'état and form a military junta. The holding of elections in 2010, won by the opposition leader Alpha Condé, paved the way for a return to the democratic system. However, the elections were marred by violence and by the coming to the fore of identity-related tensions between the country's main ethnic communities. The country remains unstable due to the lack of a strategy for national reconciliation and obstacles to the reform of the security sector, with an army that is omnipresent in Guinean political activity, kept the country in a state of instability for years. In 2021, political tension in the country rose significantly after the presidential election in late 2020 that gave President Alpha Condé his third term, which the opposition claimed is unconstitutional. The political crisis led to a new coup d'état on 5 September 2021, led by Colonel Mamay Doumbouya, who overthrew Condé's government.

Tensions between the military junta and the political opposition simmered throughout the year after no progress was made in the national dialogue and signs of division in the security forces increased. The year began with the sustained efforts of the West African regional bloc ECOWAS to relaunch the inter-Guinean inclusive

49. Blaise, Lilia, Tunisia's President Saied claims sub-Saharan migrants threaten country's identity, *Le Monde*, 23 February 2023.
50. OHCHR, Türk: Human rights are antidote to prevailing politics of distraction, deception, indifference and repression, 11 September 2023.
51. Tondo, Lorenzo, 'I had to drink my own urine to survive': Africans tell of being forced into the desert at Tunisia border, *The Guardian*, 28 September 2023.
52. Human Rights Watch, Tunisia, *World Report 2024*, 2024.
53. Zelin, Aaron, All Quiet on the North African Jihadi Front, *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 6 June 2023.

dialogue that had been held in late 2022 to ease tensions between the military junta and political and civil society groups, but the government led by Lieutenant Colonel Doumbouya rejected the idea, saying that the dialogue had ended. Later, in early March, religious leaders launched a new initiative to resume the national dialogue. Though they managed to hold several rounds of negotiations in the capital, Conakry, the talks did not achieve any tangible progress to alleviate the political crisis. The Living Forces of Guinea (FVG), an opposition coalition that includes the banned National Front for the Defence of the Constitution (FNDC), the Rally of the Guinean People (RPG) of former President Condé and the Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (UFDG) led by Cellou Dalein Diallo, demanded the release of detained opposition figures, the lifting of the ban on protests and the creation of a new national dialogue overseen by ECOWAS. In early May, the FVG pulled out of the dialogue and demonstrated in Conakry, but the gathering was broken up by the security forces, causing the death of seven protesters and injuring 32 others, according to the FVG. The tension in the capital caused the authorities to deploy the Guinean Army in late May. In June, the FVG paused its demonstrations due to the celebration of Eid al-Adha, the festival of sacrifice, one of the two most important Islamic celebrations of the year, temporarily easing the tension. A court subsequently acquitted three leaders of the civil society platform FNDC, including Oumar Sylla, also known as Foniké Mengué, of all charges against them in mid-2022, though the prosecutor appealed the decision. The acquittal was one of the FVG's main preconditions for resuming negotiations with the military junta. During the rest of the year, talks were not resumed and opposition protests against the military junta continued.

Alongside the tensions with the opposition, **various events took place related to the security forces' growing opposition to the military junta**. For instance, in late April and early May, President Doumbouya sacked the military intelligence chief, Lieutenant Colonel Ismaël Keïta, and the main figure of the junta, General Sadiba Coulibaly, as chief of the General Staff of the Guinean Armed Forces. He also dissolved the battalion in charge of presidential security. In late August, there were rumours of an attempted coup d'état in the country that would have pitted the forces of the junta against the National Guard, leading to the arrest of an unknown number of military officers. Finally, on 4 November, armed individuals released former military President Moussa Dadis Camara from prison in Conakry along with three close collaborators who had been on trial since 2022 for the Conakry stadium massacre in 2009, though they were captured days later by the security forces, with the exception of the former Minister of Presidential Security, Colonel Claude Pivi, who remained at large at the end of the year. These events caused new purges in the military, resulting in the dismissal of more than 60 soldiers, gendarmes and prison officials accused of being collaborators.

Relations between the military junta and ECOWAS gradually deteriorated during the year. In early February, the foreign ministers of Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso met in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, and asked ECOWAS and the African Union to lift the sanctions imposed on them following the military coups in 2021 and 2022. Meanwhile, the Guinean military junta unilaterally created a committee to oversee the political transition in the country, ignoring ECOWAS' efforts to create an inclusive committee. In October, the ECOWAS Court of Justice ruled that the continued detentions of former Prime Minister Ibrahima Kassory Fofana and two Condé-era ministers were "arbitrary" and ordered their immediate release, giving the Guinean government three months to comply.

Nigeria	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=
Type:	Identity, Resources, Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political opposition, Christian and Muslim communities, livestock and farming communities, community militias, criminal gangs, IMN

Summary:
After gaining its independence in 1960, the inability of the country's successive governments to address issues associated with citizenship, ethnicity, religion and resource distribution has aggravated perceptions of grievances and discontent, leading to the rise of separatist demands in various regions. Moreover, since 1999, when political power was returned to civilian hands after a succession of dictatorships and coups, the government has not managed to establish a stable democratic system in the country. Huge economic and social differences remain between the states that make up Nigeria, due to the lack of real decentralisation, and between the various social strata, which fosters instability and outbreaks of violence. Moreover, strong inter-religious, inter-ethnic and political differences continue to fuel violence throughout the country. Political corruption and the lack of transparency are the other main stumbling blocks to democracy in Nigeria. Mafia-like practices and the use of political assassination as an electoral strategy have prevented the free exercise of the population's right to vote, leading to increasing discontent and fraudulent practices. At the same time, the actions of criminal groups in the northwestern part of the country, caused by different factors, have multiplied since 2018.

The climate of political violence and of criminal violence perpetrated by criminal groups persisted in northwest north central Nigeria, while violence in the Lake Chad basin (northeast) rose compared to 2022.[54] The presidential and parliamentary elections held on 25 February 2023 only aggravated the situation. Added to this was the recurring climate of intercommunity violence between ranchers and farmers in the Middle Belt, the persistence of clashes and insurgent attacks

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54. See the summary on Lake Chad (Boko Haram) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).

in Biafra region[55] and the proliferation of militias and local security forces that has taken place in recent years.[56] In the country as a whole, 3,272 violent events were reported that caused 8,510 fatalities in 2023, according to ACLED, though these figures also included the violence connected to the armed conflict with Boko Haram.[57] In the four northwestern states of the country (Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna and Niger), the epicentre of violence caused by criminal groups, 2,344 people were killed, according to ACLED, though this figure rises to 2,869 if the states of Kebbi and Sokoto are included. This death toll in these states is practically half of the 4,481 in 2022 (4,920 including Kebbi and Sokoto) and the 3,918 in 2021 (4,484 including Kebbi and Sokoto). The body counts showed a drop in violence in these states during 2023 compared to previous years.[58] The most important events included a drone strike conducted by the Nigerian Army that mistook a religious celebration for a gathering of criminal groups in Kaduna State in December in which 85 civilians died. The strike was criticised at home and abroad[59] until the government announced that it was opening an investigation. The Nigerian Army's operations, including its use of air strikes against criminal groups, were harshly criticised during the year for their ineffectiveness and their consequences for the civilian population. According to UNHCR, the number of forcibly displaced people in the entire country rose to almost 3.5 million, nearly 1.2 million of which were in the northwestern and north-central states.[60]

In political and social developments, the elections took place amidst intense political violence, especially in the southern states. In January, the electoral commission warned that insecurity could derail the general elections scheduled for 25 February and 11 March. The All Progressives Congress (APC) consolidated its power by winning the presidential election, then expanded its control by winning 22 of the 36 state governor elections (ratified by the courts in favour of the APC). The former governor of Lagos State and APC candidate Bola Tinubu won the presidential election with 36.61% of the votes (8.8 million). The election was intensely questioned, with accusations of fraud. The main contenders were former Vice President Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and former Anambra State Governor Peter Obi of the Labor Party. A climate of political violence hung over

the general elections and the process was marred by reports of vote buying, voter intimidation, attacks on election workers and offices in certain areas and accusations of outright fraud by the opposition, which harmed its credibility. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) acknowledged that it made mistakes in displaying the results, prompting significant criticism and mistrust of the results and new accusations of fraud. These circumstances, along with statements made by observers and civil society groups criticising the INEC, led the Abubakar, Obi and Rabi'u Kwankwaso campaigns first to question, then to officially reject the election results announced before 28 February. The three main opposition candidates, some civil society groups and former President Olusegun Obasanjo called on the INEC to hold the elections again. On 29 May, Tinubu was officially named president, though the political and social opposition's appeals were not dismissed until September by the Presidential Election Petitions Court. A second appeal was definitively rejected by the Supreme Court in late October.

Tinubu replaced all the heads of the intelligence services, appointed a cabinet of 48 ministers (one of the largest in the country's recent history, including major figures from previous governments)[61] and attempted to carry out unpopular economic reforms in a year marked by growing social and economic instability[62] due to the increase in inflation (close to 29%, a level that had not been seen in the country since the 1990s) linked to the rising prices of basic products and the withdrawal of the petrol subsidy, which sparked major protests and union demonstrations. Furthermore, the official currency, the naira, had lost 41% of its value (30% in the parallel market) against the US dollar between May and December.

Nigeria (Biafra)	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=
Type:	Identity, Self-government Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, separatist organisations MASSOB and IPOB (which has an armed wing, the ESN)

55. See the summary on Nigeria (Biafra) in this chapter.
56. See the summary on Nigeria in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Alert 2023! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2023.
57. ACLED, Dashboard [Viewed on 19 February 2024]. This figure includes three types of violent events (battles, violence against civilians and attacks with improvised explosive devices). If we include the categories of riots, protests and strategic events, it rises to 8,764 fatalities.
58. However, this death toll must be relativised given the difficulties in distinguishing the actions of these groups of criminal gangs from other dynamics of violence due to the many different actors, including criminal groups, security forces, armed jihadist actors, groups linked to ranching communities and civilian self-defence militias.
59. Amnesty International, Nigeria: Military attempting to cover up mass killing of civilians, 7 December 2023.
60. UNHCR, Operational Data Portal – Nigeria, 30 June 2023.
61. Adekaiyaoja, Afolabi, Tinubu's cabinet nominees: Renewed hope or recycled tropes?, African Arguments, 8 August 2023.
62. Busari, Stephany, "Nigeria's Bola Tinubu sworn in as president, facing divided nation and economic woes," *CNN*, 29 May 2023.

Summary:

After winning its independence in 1960, Nigeria has faced the challenge of bringing together the different ethnic nationalities. The most paradigmatic example was the civil war between the government and the self-proclaimed Republic of Biafra (1967-1970), in which between one and three million people died. After three decades of military rule, the advent of democracy in 1999 gave rise to new expectations that the various identities could be accommodated and demands for political restructuring that have not come true, fuelling separatist grievances. In this context, demands for self-determination have resurfaced in the southeastern part of the country—known as Biafra by separatist movements—through nonviolent organisations, mainly with the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), created in 1999, then by other secessionist movements, including the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), created in 2012. The rise to power of Muhammadu Buhari in 2015, perceived as a threat in the southern regions, has contributed to a rise in tension. The imprisonment in 2015 of IPOB leader Nnamdi Kanu caused an increase in demonstrations that were harshly repressed by the Nigerian security forces, which have since launched a campaign of violence and extrajudicial executions. This situation worsened with the banning of the IPOB in 2017 and the increase in violence in the second half of 2020, especially in light of the IPOB ban.

In southeastern Nigeria, fighting continued between insurgents and the security forces, causing dozens of fatalities. The armed wing of the IPOB independence movement, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), continued to carry out armed attacks throughout the year. According to the research centre ACLED, there were 660 violent deaths (battles, violence against civilians and improvised explosive devices) in 2023 that claimed 776 lives in the 10 states that make up the Biafra region (Enugu, Anambra, Ebonyi, Imo, Abia, Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Delta and Cross River, though most conflict-related deaths were concentrated in the first five, where the Igbo community is the majority). In 2022, there were 703 events and 985 fatalities. ACLED's body count included the violence linked to the armed clashes in Biafra between the Nigerian government and armed pro-independence groups, which killed dozens, as well as the many attacks in these states committed by criminal groups and inter-community clashes over land use and ownership and access to water, which claim hundreds of lives each year.

Dozens of people died during the year as a result of the climate of instability, recurring military operations and attacks on police stations and military detachments, which seriously hindered the development of the presidential and parliamentary elections in February 2023. The most notable events of the year included an IPOB commando ambush in Ehime Mbano (Imo State) in September in which eight members of the security forces died and an attack in the town of Oba (Anam-bra State) in December against a self-defence militia that killed seven civilians and members of the militia. In late September, the Nigerian Air Force bombed two locations identified as possible IPOB training bases and armouries in the Nnewi North area (Anambra State) and Okigwe area (Imo State). In November, the Abia State government discovered a mass grave containing 70 bodies, allegedly those of people kidnapped for ransom.

Some statements made in October could reveal tension within the IPOB. Two major IPOB factions issued conflicting messages on future plans. On 5 October, the self-proclaimed prime minister of the Biafra Republic Government in Exile (BRGIE), Simon Ekpa, who had declared himself commander of the new Biafra Liberation Army (BLA) in August, said the Biafran authorities would "soon begin full government". Two days later, however, the dominant IPOB faction said that the group was open to talks with the federal government on Biafran independence through a UN-supervised referendum, offering Tinubu the opportunity to start a dialogue on the issue.[63] In addition, the Supreme Court reinstated terrorism charges against IPOB leader Nnamdi Kanu in December 2023. The charges had previously been withdrawn on 13 October 2022 by the Court of Appeal in Abuja.[64] The Supreme Court's decision in December could change the previous announcements made by different parts of the IPOB. The Supreme Court ruled that Nnamdi Kanu should be tried for terrorism even though his extradition from Kenya had been illegal. It is feared that this decision will lead to an escalation of violence by the IPOB.

Senegal	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition

Summary:

Between 1960, when it gained its independence, and 2000, Senegal was ruled by a one-party state system headed by the Socialist Party of Senegal. From then on, Senegal began to use a multiparty system and opposition leader Abdoulaye Wade won the presidential election of 2000 as the candidate of the Senegalese Democratic Party. Wade remained in power until 2012, when he was defeated by Macky Sall, the candidate of the Alliance for the Republic. In 2019, Ousmane Sonko, a young man from the southern region of Casamance, ran for election leading the Senegalese Patriots for Work, Ethics and Fraternity (PASTEF) party on an anti-colonial platform focused on the lack of opportunities for Senegalese youth. Sonko finished third in the race, but his stature grew throughout

63. Ugwu, Chinagorom, 'We're now ready for dialogue with Nigerian govt,' – IPOB, *Premium Times Nigeria,* 7 October 2023.
64. See the summary on Nigeria (Biafra) in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Alert 2023! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2023.

the country, which demanded a change in government. This marked the beginning of mass demonstrations staged by Senegalese youth. Later, in February 2021, Sonko was arrested, causing his followers to take to the streets in what they considered a move to disqualify him from running for president. Thereafter, a major political crisis broke out in 2022 between the government of President Macky Sall and the political and social opposition.

The political crisis worsened in Senegal between the government and the opposition during the year, causing many protests and clashes with security forces that claimed dozens of lives. In May, the political tensions that had emerged in 2022 increased significantly when the Court of Appeal extended the suspended prison sentence given to Ousmane Sonko, the leader of the opposition party African Patriots of Senegal for Work, Ethics and Fraternity (PASTEF), from two to six months for a defamation case. This could block him from running in the presidential election initially scheduled for February 2024. The sentence sparked protests and clashes between Sonko's followers and security forces in the city of Ziguinchor, Sonko's stronghold in the Casamance region, and in the capital, Dakar, leaving at least two dead. In another trial, in which Sonko was charged with rape, the prosecutor asked the court to declare Sonko guilty on 24 May and asked for a 10-year prison sentence. This mobilised Sonko's followers, who marched from Ziguinchor to Dakar led by the opposition leader. On 1 June, Sonko was sentenced to two years in prison for "corrupting the youth", which de facto disqualified him running for president, and he was acquitted of the rape charge. The verdict sparked protests by Sonko supporters, mainly in Ziguinchor and Dakar, who claimed it was politically motivated. On 2 June, the government deployed the Senegalese Army in Dakar. Days later, it cut off Internet access. According to government data, the harsh crackdowns on the protests left 16 protesters dead, while Amnesty International reported 23 fatalities and PASTEF cited 30. Dozens of other people were injured and around 500 people were arrested across the country.

Amidst this tension, on 3 July, President Macky Sall announced that he would not run for re-election in what would have been his third candidacy for the presidency. The announcement eased tensions in the country for a time, as it was one of the opposition's main demands. At the end of July, however, Senegalese police arrested Sonko on charges of planning an insurrection. The government dissolved PASTEF and restricted access to the Internet once again, triggering new social protests and clashes that left two people dead. In response, Sonko declared that he would begin a hunger strike. He was admitted to hospital on 6 August. Many different Senegalese figures, including former minister Serigne Diop and the president of the Senegalese League for Human Rights, Alassane Seck, signed a petition

demanding Sonko's release and a lift on the ban against PASTEF. On 14 December, the Court of First Instance in Dakar reinstated Sonko to the electoral register, allowing him to run in the 2024 presidential elections. However, the government challenged the court's decision, talking it to the Supreme Court. The "Sonko President 2024" coalition nominated Sonko as a presidential candidate in a virtual ceremony on 31 December after the authorities banned the nomination meeting initially scheduled for 30 December in Dakar, citing risks to public order.[65] By the end of the year, political tension in the country remained high ahead of the presidential election and Sonko was facing charges of inciting insurrection, conspiring with terrorist groups and threatening state security.

2.3.2. America

North America, Central America and the Caribbean

Haiti	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government Internationalised
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, organised crime groups

Summary:
The current crisis affecting the country, with mass protests and numerous episodes of violence recorded in 2019, is linked to the accusations of corruption, electoral fraud and negligence in the action of the Government of President Jovenel Moïse. However, the situation of institutional paralysis, economic fragility and socio-political crisis began to worsen after the forced departure from the country of former President Jean Bertrand Aristide in February 2004, who avoided an armed conflict with the rebel group that had taken over much of the country. Since then, the deployment of a Multinational Interim Force and later of a UN peacekeeping mission (MINUSTAH, replaced by MINUJUSTH in 2017 and by BINUH in 2019) and the greater involvement and coordination of the international community in normalising the situation in the country have led to progress in certain areas of its governance, but have not succeeded in achieving political, social and economic stability, nor have they reduced the high levels of corruption, poverty, social exclusion and crime rates, or completely eliminated the control held by armed gangs in certain urban areas of the country.

In 2023, the unprecedented political, humanitarian and security crisis in the country worsened after the assassination of former President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021. In 2023, 4,789 homicides were reported, 119.4% more than the previous year, with a rate of 41 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, one of the highest in the world and notably higher than in 2022 (when there were 18 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants).

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65. Le Monde, "*Senegal's authorities prohibit nomination meeting planned for opposition leader Sonko*", 30 December 2023.

The number of kidnappings in 2023 rose by 83% compared to 2022 and reached 2,490. **According to the United Nations, by the end of the year, over 300 organised criminal gangs controlled over 80% of the metropolitan region of the capital, as well as the main connecting routes between Port-au-Prince and the rest of the country and some key infrastructure for providing basic services**. Beyond the metropolitan region of the capital, several reports indicated that organised criminal gangs had expanded their territorial coverage, especially towards the Artibonite Valley and the areas around the cities of Gonaives (northwest) and Cap Haitien (north). By the end of 2023, around two million people lived in areas controlled by criminal gangs. The violence and clashes between the two main coalitions of criminal organisations (called G9 and G-Pèp) rose sharply in the second half of the year, especially after the death of one of the leaders and founders of the G9 coalition in mid-November. According to ACLED, over 450 people lost their lives due to clashes between rival gangs, while over 460 were killed in fighting between the armed groups and state security forces. Civilian self-defence groups and militias have proliferated in the main urban areas of the country, especially the Bwa Kale group, formed in April 2023 to prevent criminal gangs from becoming entrenched in certain neighbourhoods of the capital. According to official data, 388 alleged members of criminal gangs were lynched between April and September 2023 alone. ACLED reported that deaths caused by the activities of self-defence militias (around 300) accounted for 15% of the political violence in 2023. For example, on 24 April, civilian self-defence groups killed at least 57 armed gang members in several neighbourhoods of Port-au-Prince.

In December, the United Nations warned that Haiti was one of nine countries facing the risk of famine, with 4.35 million people suffering from food insecurity, one of the worst rates in the world in proportion to the country's population. The number of people needing humanitarian aid has almost doubled in the last three years. OCHA also warned of the risk of collapse of basic services, such as healthcare and education. The United Nations said that attacks on schools by gang members had multiplied by nine in 2023 and OCHA estimates that one million minors are not going to school, increasing their risk of recruitment by gangs. Gang attacks against healthcare staff and hospitals multiplied, some of which had to close (such as Doctors without Borders in Port-au-Prince) or could no longer function due to a lack of fuel, medical supplies or employees. **ACLED estimates that over 650 civilians were killed by dozens of armed gangs operating in the country. Furthermore, in the areas controlled by these gangs, several NGOs reported the use of sexual violence against women and girls as a weapon of war** and a means of intimidation, territorial control and domination. Between January and August 2023 alone, a total of 3,056 cases of rape

In 2023, the unprecedented political, humanitarian and security crisis in Haiti worsened following the assassination of former President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021

were reported, 49% more than in 2022, though the real figure could be much higher. According to other estimates, sexual violence increased by 80% compared to the previous year. According to the OHCHR and the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti, civilians are not only victims of sexual violence in areas controlled by armed groups, but they are also targeted for kidnapping when using public transport. Gangs also loot civilians' homes, farms, fields and livestock and destroy irrigation canals. Finally, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) indicated that there were more than 310,000 internally displaced people in December 2023 and that 60% of them had fled their homes in 2023, especially in the metropolitan region around the capital. In addition to internal displacement, the violence and economic insecurity led to an unprecedented rise in the number of people leaving the country. In 2023 alone, it is estimated that over 100,000 Haitians entered the United States illegally.

Faced with this situation, on 2 October **the UN Security Council authorised the creation of the Multinational Security Support Mission** (MSS) with the primary objective of supporting the Haitian National Police to restore security, protect infrastructure and communication routes vital to the country and create favourable conditions for holding elections. Though the UN Security Council passed the resolution creating the MSS for 12 months under the mandate of Chapter Seven of the United Nations Charter, this is not a UN mission, but rather an ad hoc coalition of countries led by Kenya and will be financed via voluntary contributions through a United Nations trust fund. At the request of the Haitian government, the United Nations had been discussing intervention formats for more than a year to address the worsening security situation. The UN Secretary-General had made several calls in this regard and in 2022 the UN Security Council had previously imposed sanctions and an arms embargo that it extended in 2023. In addition, the US and Canada had sent military equipment to the Haitian police to strengthen their capabilities. In early 2024, over three months after the resolution creating the MSS was passed, there were still serious doubts about some of the mission's operational issues. Some analysts say that the MSS will be made up of between 2,500 and 5,000 troops from a dozen countries, but some Caribbean countries (Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados and Belize) that had expressed their commitment to the mission had not yet finalised their contribution to it. Even the participation of Kenya, the country that leads the MSS, whose government opposition questioned such a deployment of troops abroad, was pending a judicial decision from the Supreme Court.

The political situation also deteriorated noticeably in the last quarter of the year. **No elections have been held in Haiti since 2016, neither of the two legislative chambers have been in session since January 2020**,

when the term of office of most MPs and senators ended, and the term of office of the last 10 senators ended in January 2023. De facto Prime Minister Ariel Henry took office in mid-2021 after the assassination of Jovenel Moïse without being directly elected. Since then, he has led the government with the support of a significant part of the international community but has faced major internal political and social opposition and high levels of protest. To deal with this situation, in the middle of the year CARICOM called the government and the opposition to a summit in Kingston (Jamaica) to try to reach an agreement that would facilitate a more inclusive transition and new elections. A delegation of former CARICOM leaders facilitated the talks in the second half of the year (with five visits to the country), but by the end of the year not only had no agreement been reached, but several of the participating political and social organisations abandoned the talks, demanded Henry's immediate resignation and joined the opposition parties leading the anti-government protests.

Honduras	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, organised crime groups

Summary:

In recent decades, Honduras has had one of the highest homicide rates in the region and the world, becoming the world leader in 2011. The Honduran authorities blame much of the country's high levels of violence on the gangs (such as Mara Salvatrucha or Mara 18) that have grown in the last two decades and on organised crime and drug trafficking organisations, which became significantly stronger during the two terms of former President Juan Orlando Hernández (2014-2022), who was extradited, tried and convicted in the US for crimes linked to drug trafficking. The country has recently undergone notable political crises with high levels of social polarisation, especially during the presidency of Manuel Zelaya (2006-2009) and after the 2009 coup d'état that overthrew him and was condemned by the international community, the suspension of Honduras' membership in the OAS and Zelaya's exile. After returning to the country in 2011, he led one of the main political groups in the country. In December 2022, President Xiomara Castro decreed a state of emergency to address the country's high levels of crime, prompting widespread criticism from human rights organisations.

In 2023, the country experienced a rise in social and political protests, many complaints of human rights violations linked to the state of emergency declared in December 2022 and a major political crisis that paralysed Parliament for four months and worsened strain between the government and the opposition. Furthermore, even though there were slightly fewer homicides in Honduras in 2023 compared to 2022, it continued to have one of the highest homicide rates in Latin America and the world and several analysts

observed more fighting between organised criminal gangs and between them and the state security forces. The government declared that 3,030 homicides had been reported in 2023, 631 fewer than in 2022. In line with the steady fall in the homicide rate in the country since reaching its historical peak in 2011 (85 per 100,000 inhabitants), in 2023 (31.1) it was lower than those of previous years, tumbling from 38.1 in 2022, 41.7 in 2021, 38.9 in 2020 and 44.7 in 2019. However, the homicide rate in Honduras is still one of the highest in Latin America (only surpassed by Ecuador if the Caribbean is not included) and in the world. President Xiomara Castro said on several occasions that the drop in homicides and other crimes during 2023 was mainly due to the state of emergency declared in December 2022, which was successively renewed throughout 2023 and is applicable in 17 of the 18 departments of the country and specifically in 158 of its 298 municipalities. The state of emergency allows the military police to support the national police in providing public security, allows the Honduran Armed Forces and security forces to make arrests and conduct searches without a court order and suspends some constitutional rights such as freedom of association, assembly and circulation. According to the government, during the first month of the state of emergency alone, 39 organised criminal gangs were dismantled and 652 people were arrested. Castro also said that thanks to the state of emergency, 48 municipalities in the country (out of a total of 298) did not report one homicide.

However, the organisation ACLED said that the Honduran government's action had ambivalent results for security in the country. Compared to the previous year, attacks by armed groups against civilians were down by 14%, while the number of civilians killed in those attacks also dropped by 7%. However, ACLED reported that between January and November 2023, armed clashes between state forces and armed groups increased by 45% over 2022, especially in the departments of San Francisco Morazán and Cortés (where Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula are located, respectively). In December 2022, the government deployed 20,000 police officers there to support anti-gang operations. According to the National Violence Observatory, run by the National Autonomous University, both the number of clashes between organised criminal gangs and the number of multiple homicides increased in 2023. Specifically, there were 44 massacres (or multiple homicides, with a minimum of three fatalities) that claimed 209 lives, 27% more than in 2022. Therefore, according to ACLED, the decrease in violent death reflects significantly fewer homicides due to interpersonal violence rather than to armed gangs and extortion activities. In December, the NGO Association for a More Just Society (ASJ) indicated that 11% of the Honduran population were victims of extortion in 2023, two per cent more than a year ago. Some analysts said that armed organised criminal gangs did not just increase their activity in 2023, but also their territorial reach. Although historically gangs have been concentrated in urban areas, a clear rise in

crime has recently been observed in rural areas. Such a trend could be motivated by the security forces' greater pressure on armed organised criminal gangs after the state of emergency and the growing militarisation of the country's public security, but some analysts also cited the reorganisation of criminal networks following the extradition of former President Juan Orlando Hernández to the United States for drug and weapons trafficking in July 2022.

According to data from ECLAC's Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, Honduras had the highest feminicide rate in Latin America (six per 100,000 inhabitants), over double that of the second country, the Dominican Republic (2.9). In December, ECLAC stated that one woman was murdered every 21 hours. These data are consistent with those of Centro de Derechos de Mujeres, which in 2023 reported the violent deaths of 386 women. In November, human rights organisations reported that 47 LGTBI+ people had been murdered in 2023, of a total of 194 since 2001. The National Human Rights Commissioner of Honduras reported that 97 journalists, social communicators and media owners have died violently in Honduras since 2001. The OHCHR reported that 15 human rights activists were murdered between January and September 2023, most of them (over 81%) for defending land, territory and the environment. During the same period, the OHCHR documented 297 attacks against 267 human rights defenders and 105 journalists in Honduras. There was also an unprecedented rise in the number of refugees and migrants in Honduras in 2023, many of them victims of violence, extortion and other illegal practices. According to data from the National Migration Institute (INM), the number of refugees and migrants who entered, registered and transited through Honduras in 2023 rose to approximately 545,000, almost triple that of 2022 and an all-time high for the country. According to UNHCR, 38% of these people reported having suffered some type of mistreatment or abuse during the trip from their country of origin or last place of residence to Honduras and 16% said that they experienced mistreatment or another form of abuse in Honduras. More than half of these people were women and minors, in line with the trend of recent years. The five largest nationalities were Venezuelan, Cuban, Guinean, Ecuadoran and Haitian. According to the United Nations, around 3.2 million people in Honduras need assistance and food aid.

During 2023, several international bodies and human rights organisations voiced concern about the militarisation of public security in Honduras and the consequences of the state of emergency. For example, Amnesty International (AI) said that the security strategy being implemented by President Castro, which according

In 2023, Honduras experienced an increase in social and political protests, many complaints of human rights violations linked to the state of emergency declared in December 2022 and a significant political crisis

to AI imitates the one pursued by Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele, is leading to a notable deterioration of human rights. Between December 2022, the date that the state of emergency was announced, and September 2023, the National Human Rights Commissioner of Honduras received almost 300 complaints of human rights violations. Some human rights organisations reported that the national police and the military police carried out constant operations in certain areas with high levels of social exclusion against young people whom they accused of belonging to a criminal organisation. They also said that since the state of emergency was imposed, cases of arbitrary detention, extrajudicial killing and forced disappearance had increased throughout the country. Thus, after visiting Honduras between late May and early June, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Morris Tidball-Binz, said that extrajudicial killings are still pervasive across the country. Impunity is also widespread due to serious shortcomings in the legal system, including unjustified procedural delays, no or limited possibility for victims to participate in the criminal process, a lack of effective investigations, the investigating authorities' obstruction or refusal to accept complaints from victims and a lack of coordination between specialised prosecutors' offices. Other United Nations expert mechanisms that visited Honduras during the year also expressed concern about the human rights situation. The OHCHR questioned the Honduran government's decision to transfer command and control of the prison system to the military police, announced in June shortly after a serious episode of gang violence at the Tamara National Women's Prison led to the death of 46 inmates. Since then, the military police carried out operations in all the country's prisons, where different forms of mistreatment and torture were reported against inmates linked to criminal gangs.

Finally, a political and institutional crisis began in August after the end of the ordinary sessions of Parliament and the constitution of a Permanent Commission of Congress (made up of nine MPs and only one member of the opposition) responsible for appointing high officials, such as the state prosecutor. This crisis shut down Parliament for four months (from August to December), notably raising political tension between the government and the opposition. Social and political protests multiplied to around 800, a number similar to that of 2022 but clearly more than in 2021 (31) and 2020 (45). The massive anti-government protests in mid-August and November were led by the Citizen Opposition Bloc, made up of the National Party, the Honduran Patriotic Alliance and the Saviour Party of Honduras (PSH) and civil society organisations. Some analysts highlighted the acute social and political polarisation in the country and warned that the current situation has some parallels

with the political and social situation that ended in a coup d'état in 2009 against President Mel Zelaya, the husband of the current president.

Mexico	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=
Type:	Government, Resources Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, organised crime groups

Summary:
Since 2006, when Felipe Calderón started the so-called "war on drug-trafficking", the level of violence and human rights' violations throughout the country increased substantially making the country one of the ones with most murders in the world. Since then, the number of organized crime structures with ties to drug trafficking have multiplied. In some parts of the country, these structures are disputing the State's monopoly on violence. According to some estimates, by the end of 2017, the "war against drug-trafficking" had caused more than 150,000 deaths and more than 30,000 disappearances. Also, Mexico has insurgency movements in States such as Guerrero and Oaxaca –including the EPR, the ERPI or the FAR-LP. In Chiapas, after a short-lived armed uprising of the EZLN in 1994, conflict is still present in Zapatista communities.

In 2023, there was a slight drop in the number of homicides compared to 2022, but the levels of violence in the country were still among the highest in the world and several analysts confirmed that organised crime structures were strengthening. According to data from the Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System, an autonomous body that aggregates data from state prosecutors, 30,253 homicides were reported in 2023, 1,431 fewer than in 2022. Almost half the homicides took place in six states, in descending order, from the highest to the lowest number of homicides: Guanajuato, México, Baja California, Chihuahua, Jalisco and Michoacán. According to government data (specifically from the Secretariat of Security and Civilian Protection), there were 29,675 homicides in 2023, 4.2% less than in 2022, making it the fourth year in a row that this number has fallen, from 34,696 in 2019 to 34,554 in 2020 and 33,308 in 2021. According to the government, since the beginning of the current President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's term in December 2018, homicides have fallen by 20%, kidnappings by 70% and feminicides by 39% (and 19% compared to 2022). The government also reported that there had been significantly fewer common crimes (such as theft or robberies) and crimes linked to organised crime. The downward trend in the number of homicides compared to previous years was also identified by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), the main official source on this matter, which publishes its data with a greater delay than the two aforementioned institutions. According to

the INEGI, there were 15,082 homicides in the first six months of 2023, 7.6% less than in 2022, the lowest figure since 2017. However, some questioned these figures because they do not include the people found in mass graves or missing people. Despite the decrease in homicides observed in 2023, the number of people murdered in Mexico during the current president's administration (166,278, including 4,760 cases of feminicide) was already clearly higher than that of his two predecessors in office, with 156,066 under Peña Nieto (2012-18) and 120,613 under Felipe Calderón (2006-12). According to some analysts, at the end of the current president's six-year term in December 2024, the number of homicides in Mexico may approach 200,000. There was also an increase in police officers killed on duty (412 in 2023, compared to 381 in 2022). Meanwhile, in mid-December, the NGO Causa en Común published a report indicating that **in 2023 there were 427 massacres, defined as the murder of three or more people in the same violent act, for a total of 2,130 since 1 January 2020**. The states with the highest number of massacres in 2023 were Guanajuato (57), Zacatecas (43) and Guerrero (41). In addition, from 2020 to the third quarter of 2023, Causa en Común also recorded 22,930 "atrocities": events including massacres, discoveries of clandestine graves, human trafficking, torture, burning, violence against migrants and the murder of minors. In the first six months of 2023 alone, 1,453 cases of torture and 729 murders of women with extreme cruelty were reported.

The OHCHR documented the murder of at least 13 human rights activists in possible relation to their work during 2023. Along the same lines, the organisation Comité Cerezo México reported that 14 human rights activists were killed by state agents in 2023, rising to a total of 93 during the current president's administration, much fewer than during Peña Nieto's six-year term (189), but many more than during Calderón's presidency (67). The NGO Article 19 reported that five journalists were killed for doing their jobs in 2023 (a clear drop from the 13 killed in 2022, of a total of 163 since 2000). It also warned that there were 561 attacks against journalists and media outlets during the year, such as armed attacks and abductions. Along the same lines, **the NGO Reporters without Borders considered Mexico the country with the highest number of missing active journalists in the world** (with 31 of a total of 84 cases, from 1995 to 1 December 2023). It added that **Mexico was the second most dangerous country for journalists in 2023, after Palestine.** Furthermore, the Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de Derechos Humanos (CMDPDH) indicated that violence in the country had forcibly displaced nearly 8,000 people in the first six months of 2023, estimating that since 2006, around 410,000 people had been forced to leave their homes due to violence.

In addition to the high number of homicides, the number of missing people increased significantly in 2023.

According to the National Search Commission's National Registry of Missing or Unlocated Persons, 12,301 cases were reported in 2023, a 30% increase compared to 2022 and 155% more over the last decade. Since the aforementioned registry began in the early 1960s until late December 2023, 113,820 cases have been reported, 42% of them during the current president's six-year term and almost 10% in 2023 alone. **Since the so-called war on drugs began in 2006, more than 100,000 people have been reported missing.** The states with the highest number of cases are Jalisco (14,927), Tamaulipas (12,931), México (12,212), Veracruz (6,966) and Mexico City (6,934), and the two states with the highest number of cases in 2023 were México (2,136) and Mexico City (1,808). The Mexican Institute of Human Rights and Democracy (IMDHD) also spoke of a forensic crisis, since more than 52,000 bodies remained unidentified at the end of 2023. **During 2023 it was revealed that 5,696 clandestine graves have been identified in 570 municipalities in the country (almost a quarter of the total) since 2007**, when mass graves began to increase drastically. Approximately half (2,864 as of April 2023) the total graves identified have been located during the current president's term, with his first year in office (2019) being when the most graves were identified (970). Fewer locations have been found since then, but this does not imply fewer illegal burials, as the hiding places could be more inaccessible to groups of searchers and the authorities, the prosecutor's office may not report its findings to the National Search Commission and the number of field searches may have been lowered. In November, the Citizen Council of the Search Commission of Mexico City reported that there were 18,000 unclaimed or unidentified bodies in the capital's mass graves alone. In December 2023, the government stated that only 11% of the cases included in the aforementioned National Registry of Missing or Unlocated Persons (that is, 12,377 people) were confirmed cases of disappearance, while the rest involved people who had been found and located and there were not enough identification or search data. This methodological change by the government prompted criticism from many human rights organisations and led to the resignation of the director of the National Search Commission. Shortly before the resignation, the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts, which was investigating the disappearance of 43 people in Ayotzinapa in 2014, announced its departure from the country and criticised the competent authorities' obstruction, pressure, restrictions and lack of cooperation to fully shed light on the case.

The Mexico Peace Index 2023 report, prepared by the Institute for Economics and Peace, indicated that **between 2015 and 2021 the number of homicides linked to organised crime and drug cartels grew from around 8,000 to over 23,500 (an increase of approximately 190%),** while the number of homicides not connected to organised crime remained relatively stable, at around 10,000 to 12,500 per year. Along the same lines, according to Uppsala University, **the total number of deaths from non-state violence increased drastically between 2011 and 2021, soaring from 2,657 to 18,783**. According to the university, one of the factors behind this sharp increase is the great territorial expansion of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), which has spread to 28 of the 32 states in the country since 2017 and is currently associated with more than 80% of homicides caused by fighting between cartels. The rivalry increased between the two most powerful cartels in the country, the Sinaloa Cartel and the CJNG, which in 2021 alone (latest data available) may have claimed 4,890 lives, more than a quarter of the total body count associated with violence between cartels. Whereas the number of clashes involving either of the two cartels accounted for 42% of the total number of deaths due to violence between cartels in 2015, the proportion had risen to 95% by 2021. In 2023, a research team published an influential article in the journal *Science* arguing that there are currently about 150 cartels in Mexico with between 160,000 and 185,000 members, about 60,000 more than in 2012. The largest cartel would be the CJNG (approximately 20% of the total), followed by the Sinaloa Cartel (10%) and La Familia Michoacana. According to the article, which had a great impact, **drug cartels are the fifth largest source of employment in the country and need to recruit about 19,000 people each year to replace those who are arrested (about 6,000 a year) or who die (17% of the total number of people recruited)**. These data are in line with statements made in the middle of the year by the director of the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) that the CJNG and the Sinaloa Cartel have about 45,000 members and collaborators in around 100 countries around the world. According to some analysts, most cartels have increasingly sophisticated weapons. In mid-July, the Secretariat of National Defence declared that from 2021 to March 2023, 23 drones allegedly belonging to drug cartels had been seized that were going to be used in bomb attacks. For example, in early January 2024, about 30 people died in the state of Guerrero after La Familia Michoacana attacked a rival criminal organisation, Los Taclos, with drones loaded with explosives. One of the most significant events in the fight against organised crime in 2023 was the arrest in January and subsequent extradition to the United States of Ovidio Guzmán, the leader of the Sinaloa Cartel and son of one of its founders, Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán. His capture in the northeastern part of the state of Sinaloa caused the death of 29 people (including 10 soldiers) and the burning of vehicles and buildings in the area. Two days before Guzmán's arrest, 17 people (including 10 prison officials) died during a riot in a Ciudad Juárez prison that 30 people used to escape, including the leader of the criminal group Los Mexicles, an organisation that several analysts link to the Sinaloa Cartel. At various times during the year, the government authorised the deployment of military personnel and National Guard troops in the state

At the end of the current president's six-year term in December 2024, the number of homicides in Mexico may approach 200,000

of Chiapas (both around San Cristóbal de las Casas and in the border region of Comalapa) to deal with the rise in fighting between groups connected to the Sinaloa Cartel and the CJNG. President López Obrador said that the drop in the number of homicides reported in recent years owes mainly to the government's strategy against organised crime and especially the role played by the National Guard. However, civil society organisations and the political opposition once again criticised the growing militarisation of public security. Thus, the Senate created a commission in March to supervise and control the role of the Mexican Armed Forces in public security and in April the Supreme Court ruled that the transfer of the National Guard to the Secretariat of National Defence was unconstitutional.

Panama	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government, Resources Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition

Summary:
The massive protests of 2023 were against the activity of the Canadian company First Quantum Minerals and its subsidiary Minera Panamá in an open-pit mine of copper, gold, silver and other minerals covering around 13,600 hectares, making it one of the largest in the world, according to some analysts. Located in the province of Colón, it lies a few kilometres from the Caribbean Sea, in the heart of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor. In 1997, the Panamanian government granted the mining company Petaquilla Minerals the right to exploit the aforementioned deposit, sparking protests from the start due to its environmental impact and prompting the filing of unconstitutionality appeals. In 2017, a few months after the government of Juan Carlos Varela extended the contract for another 20 years, the concession was declared unconstitutional, but the ruling was not published until the end of 2021, so the company was able to continue operating without a current legal contract. In early 2022, the Cortizo government and the company began negotiations to extend the contract, but due to the lack of agreement and the government's accusations that First Quantum Mineral was non-compliant with its commitments, it ordered the company to suspend its activities in December 2022. However, negotiations between both parties continued in the first few months of 2023.

Panama witnessed the largest protests in recent decades in which five people died, dozens were injured and over 1,000 were arrested. In addition, road blockades in various parts of the country, including the Pan-American Highway, which connects it from north to south and with the rest of the Central American isthmus, caused shortages of basic products in different places. The protests began in October 2023, shortly after Parliament passed and the president fast-tracked a law that extended First Quantum Minerals' mining concession for another 20 years, with the option of renewal for another 20 years, alleging that the company's activity accounted for 5% of the country's GDP (Panama is the 14th largest exporter of copper worldwide). After learning of this decision, **tens of thousands of people demonstrated uninterruptedly in the capital and in various parts of the country to protest the extension of the concession** on the grounds that it would bring serious environmental damage to a region that is especially important for the country's biodiversity, which threatens Panama's national sovereignty and harms the economic interests of the state (because the taxes paid by the company are considered insufficient). Mass protests for several days led to clashes between protesters and security forces that injured dozens of people, caused significant material damage and closed many roads throughout the country. Given this situation, in early November the government declared a moratorium on mining activity in the country, excluding the concessions already approved, which lowered the intensity of the protests to some extent. The government also announced its interest in the Supreme Court's ruling on appeals of the unconstitutionality of the contract extension to prevent millions in penalties in a possible judicial or arbitration process with the company if it were repealed. In late November, the Supreme Court declared the contract between the state and First Quantum Minerals (and its subsidiary Minera Panamá) unconstitutional. Shortly thereafter, the state announced the gradual and orderly termination of the company's activities and the resignation of the Minister of Commerce and Industry.

South America

Ecuador	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government, Resources Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, organised crime groups

Summary:
In recent years, Ecuador has experienced one of the sharpest rises in violence in all of Latin America. In 2022, the government reported that the homicide rate had multiplied by almost five since 2017 and that over 80% of the murders in the country are linked to drug trafficking. Although Ecuador has historically been a transit point for illicit drugs, some analysts indicate that the country is steadily playing a more prominent role in the international drug supply chain, especially for cocaine, including more participation in the storage, processing, production and international distribution of narcotics, mainly through Pacific routes (a significant percentage of the homicides takes place in the coastal city of Guayaquil) and the Amazon, thanks to its border with Brazil. The situation has led to a substantial increase in clashes for the control of strategic places and routes between local organised crime groups (such as Los Lobos, Los Choneros and Los Lagartos), Mexican cartels (especially the Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel), dissident factions of the FARC (such as the Oliver Sinisterra Front and the Urías Rondón column) and international criminal organisations.

Ecuador faced a serious political crisis in 2023 that led to the dissolution of the National Assembly and calls for early elections, as well as an unprecedented rise in violence, prompting a state of emergency at various times of the year. According to official data, 7,878 violent deaths were reported in 2023, with a homicide rate of 46.5 for every 100,000 inhabitants, the highest in the Americas (except in the Caribbean). During the government of Lenín Moreno (2017-2021), the homicide rate ranged from six to eight per 100,000 inhabitants, but in 2021, when Guillermo Lasso became president, it climbed to 14, then soared to 25.9 in 2022. The provinces of Guayas, Los Ríos, Manabí, El Oro, Esmeraldas and Santo Domingo accounted for 86.44% of all homicides in 2023. Various analysts consider these areas key in the value chains of drug trafficking and international arms trafficking. The province of Guayas stands out especially as the location of nearly half the intentional homicides in the country, and specifically its capital, Guayaquil, which is home to neighbourhoods like Nueva Prosperina, with a homicide rate of 114 per 100,000 inhabitants, one of the highest in the world. Some organisations reported an impunity rate of more than 91%. According to the police, 80% of the killings in Ecuador were caused by clashes between criminal groups like Los Choneros, Los Lobos and Los Tiguerones, which seek to control the distribution and export of drugs, mainly cocaine. Given this situation, in April the Public and State Security Council declared that organised criminal groups linked to Colombian and Mexican cartels (especially the Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel) and to other international organised criminal groups have officially been listed as terrorist organisations. This allows the mobilisation of the Ecuadoran Armed Forces without the prior declaration of a state of emergency and could affect around 20 criminal organisations, according to some media outlets. The day after this statement was made, 10 people were murdered in Guayaquil in an armed attack that the government linked to fighting between gangs for territorial control. The government also declared a state of emergency in July and August (that it later extended) to address the crisis of violence rocking the country.

In line with the rise in violence observed in the prison system since 2020 (around 500 people are estimated to have been killed during that period), there were several major episodes of violence in some prisons in 2023. In July, 31 inmates died and another 14 were injured during clashes between rival gangs at the Litoral prison in Guayaquil. Two days later, after inmates from 13 prisons in the country began a hunger strike and took several prison officials hostage, President Lasso decreed a state of emergency throughout the country's prison system and authorised the deployment of 2,700

Ecuador faced a serious political crisis that caused the dissolution of Parliament and calls for early elections, as well as an unprecedented rise in violence, prompting a state of emergency at various times of the year

troops to regain control of the Litoral prison. In April, 18 inmates and three prison officers had died in another episode of violence between rival gangs in the same prison. According to the government, 67 violent deaths were reported in the country's prisons in 2023.

In addition to the high levels of violence linked to organised crime and within the prison system, there was a drastic increase in political violence during the year, to the point that the Citizen Observatory of Political Violence (OCVP) declared that the presidential election in August had been the most violent election in the history of the country. The research centre reported 88 cases of political violence in 2023, 86% of which targeted political leaders (candidates and public officials) and the remaining 14% targeted their family members and people close to them. The OCVP blamed most of these episodes on organised criminal groups, especially those related to drug trafficking. The murders with the greatest social and political impact were that of the mayor of Manta (the third largest city in the country, in the province of Manabí) in late July and that of presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio in Quito in mid-August. After the mayor of Manta was assassinated, President Lasso decreed a state of emergency in the provinces of Manabí and Los Ríos and in the city of Durán (Guayas), as well as a curfew in Manta. The curfew coincided with a state of emergency in the penal system so the authorities could regain control over the country's prisons. The assassination of Villavicencio in mid-August, 10 days before the elections, also prompted the deployment of the Ecuadoran Armed Forces throughout the country and a state of emergency that allowed the Ecuadoran Armed Forces and police to use force legitimately and exceptionally to control public order and ensure public security and to conduct inspections and searches aimed at finding weapons and illicit substances. The government also ordered a large-scale military and police operation involving around 4,000 troops to transfer José Adolfo "Fito" Macías, the leader of Los Choneros, to a maximum security centre. Los Choneros is one of the most powerful criminal gangs in the country and "Fito" Macías had threated Villavicencio. However, this government action failed to put an end to the riots or episodes of violence in the country's prisons. For example, in late August, shortly after Villavicencio was killed and the presidential election was held, the criminal gang Los Lobos detained 50 prison guards and seven police officers during several riots in six prisons in the country in response to an operation carried out by the Ecuadoran Armed Forces and police in the Latacunga prison to seize weapons and in protest against a series of prisoner transfers.

Alongside the unprecedented rise in violence, the country also underwent a major political crisis in 2023.

In mid-May, the day after the National Assembly began a political trial against Guillermo Lasso on charges of plotting corruption, he claimed internal disturbances and a serious political crisis and signed a decree dissolving Parliament and calling extraordinary presidential and legislative elections, so that both Lasso and the National Assembly were elected. Lasso also ordered the Ecuadoran Armed Forces to surround the Parliament building so it could not remain in session or continue the recently initiated impeachment trial. This provoked some protests in the days immediately thereafter and drew criticism from many opposition parties and social organisations, which asserted that the president only dissolved Parliament to avoid prosecution, saying it was proof of the country's democratic backsliding. Some organisations like the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), which has historically demonstrated a great capacity for mobilisation, said that Lasso had pulled off a covert self-coup, opening the door to dictatorship. Finally, in the presidential election held on 20 August (first round) and 15 October (second round) during the state of emergency, Daniel Noboa won by a narrow margin over the candidate of the Citizen Revolution Movement, Luisa González. The Citizen Revolution Movement won the legislative elections, with Movimiento Construye (MC25) coming in second place. Fernando Villavicencio had been Movimiento Construye's presidential candidate.

Peru	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government, Resources Internal
Main parties:	Government, armed opposition (Militarised Communist Party of Peru), political and social opposition (peasant and indigenous organisations)

Summary:
In 1980, just when democracy had been restored in the country, an armed conflict began between the government and the Maoist armed group Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso in Spanish) that lasted for two decades and claimed 60,000 lives. The counter-insurgency policy implemented in the 1990s pushed the state towards authoritarianism under Alberto Fujimori, who in 2000 went into exile in Japan having been deposed by congress and accused of numerous cases of corruption and human rights violations. Since 2008, the remaining Shining Path factions, renamed Militarized Communist Party of Peru, have stepped up their operations significantly in the Alto Huallaga region and especially in the VRAE region (Valley between the Apurímac and Ene Rivers). The government, which claims that the Shining Path organisation is involved in drug trafficking, has intensified its military operations in both regions notably and has refused to enter into talks of any sort. It has also intensified the political and legal struggle against its political arm, Movadef. Meanwhile, several collectives, especially indigenous groups, have organised periodical mobilisations to protest against the economic policy of successive governments and against the activity of mining companies.

Peru remained mired in one of the largest political crises in the country's recent history, caused mainly by massive anti-government protests that took place between January and March in various parts of the country in which about 50 people died, more than 700 were injured and hundreds more were arrested. Especially intense in Quito and in the regions of Apurímac, La Libertad, Puno, Junín, Arequipa and Ayacucho, the protests were the continuation of those that had been active since early December 2022 following the removal and arrest of President Pedro Castillo, charged with planning to carry out a coup d'état against himself. Some protesters demanded the resignation of President Dina Boluarte (who as vice president of the country assumed the presidency after Castillo was removed), the closure of Congress, the calling of a constituent assembly, the formation of a transitional government to move the elections forward and the end of police crackdowns on protests. Some groups called for the release of former President Castillo. Since Boluarte assumed the presidency in December 2022 until 20 February 2023, the OHCHR reported 1,327 protests nationwide, 882 demonstrations, 240 blocked roads, 195 gatherings and 60 peace marches. According to figures recognised by the Office of the Ombudsman, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), Amnesty International (AI) and the United Nations, 77 people have died since the beginning of the protests in December, 70 of them civilians, as well as one police officer and six soldiers. Forty-nine of the civilian fatalities were due to state repression and clashes with security forces and 11 were caused during road blockades. Around 1,880 people were injured. The deadliest episode of violence occurred on 9 January 2023 in Juliaca, when 18 protesters and bystanders died from gunshot wounds and pellets and, according to some media outlets, one police officer died from burns. The United Nations, the OAS, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International denounced the police's excessive use of force in containing the protests and urged the government to begin a dialogue with the protesters and the communities affected by the violence, take concrete action to regain public trust, launch thorough and independent investigations into abuse committed by the security forces and expedite judicial processes so that those responsible are held accountable. In May, the IACHR concluded that the security forces used excessive force and that some of the deaths could have been cases of extrajudicial killing. Amnesty International also claimed that the government's response to the protests had a racial bias, since 80% of the total people reported dead since they began were members of the indigenous and peasant population. Along the same lines, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, Clément Nyaletsossi Voule, said that Peru's deeply-rooted exclusion, racism and discrimination shaped the government's response to the protests and described the indigenous communities that protested as stigmatised.

In a context of national and international condemnations for the excessive use of force, on 11 January the Prosecutor's Office opened a preliminary investigation into the alleged crimes of genocide, aggravated homicide and serious injury against President Dina Boluarte, Prime Minister Alberto Otárola, the minister of the interior, the minister of defence and two former ministers. Boluarte refused to resign and convene a constituent assembly and extended the state of emergency issued in December to Lima and several parts of the country. Boluarte criticised the violence carried out by certain groups of demonstrators, claiming that some protests sought to break and sabotage the rule of law and that some groups that had encouraged the protests had links to drug trafficking, illegal mining and smuggling. Days later, however, she urged the organisers for a national truce, apologised to the families of those killed in the protests and asked Congress to move the elections forward to 2023 (the first round in October and the second in December). Congress rejected her request, so in principle Boluarte should remain in office until 2026. The president also announced her intention to amend the 1993 Constitution, ratified during the administration of Alberto Fujimori. These announcements failed to put an end to the demonstrations, however, and were followed by serious clashes between police and protesters in Lima. Finally, the protests subsided noticeably starting in early March, but were revived again in mid-July for reasons similar to those of December 2022 and early 2023, but with greater emphasis on the president's resignation. According to the Office of the Ombudsman, there were marches in 59 provinces and road blockades in 64. In Lima, new clashes were reported between security forces and hundreds of people trying to enter Congress. In late July, a new wave of protests swept the country, with demonstrations in 18 provinces and 14 blocked roads, according to the Office of the Ombudsman. Boluarte offered a national reconciliation pact in response, guaranteed that justice would be granted to the victims of state repression and asked the victims' families for forgiveness. Boluarte also asked Congress to delegate legislative powers to the executive branch for 120 days to be able to crack down on crime. In December, on the first anniversary of the arrest of former President Castillo, the Office of the Ombudsman said that demonstrations were reported in 20 provinces, in 15 of the 25 regions of Peru, but they were clearly smaller in scope than those in the early and middle parts of the year and no serious incidents were reported. **There was also fighting during the year between police and military personnel and members of the Militarised Communist Party of Peru (MPCP),** the name of the remaining Shining Path faction in the Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro Rivers Valley region (VRAEM). Seven police officers died in mid-February in an ambush by the group in Cuzco (VRAEM) led by Comrade Carlos, who is part of the group's first generation of combatants. According to some media reports, Carlos may have participated in the massacre of 16 people in the department of Junín in May 2021, a few days before the second round of the presidential election. A few days later, two other

soldiers died in another clash in Vizcatán del Ene (Satipo province, Junín department). In September, four soldiers and two members of the MPCP were killed and three soldiers were wounded during fighting in the VRAEM, specifically in the province of Huanta (department of Ayacucho). In November, the minister of the interior declared that he had dealt one of the heaviest blows against the MPCP in recent years after the arrest of four of the group's leaders, including the son of MPCP leader Víctor Quispe Palomino.

Venezuela	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↓
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition

Summary:
The current political and social crisis gripping the country goes back to the rise to power of Hugo Chávez in 1998 and his promotion of the so-called Bolivarian Revolution, but it became more acute during the political transition that led to Chávez's death in March 2013 and his replacement by Vice President Nicolás Maduro, which was considered unconstitutional by the opposition. The tensions rose markedly after the presidential election of April 2013, which Maduro won by a narrow margin (50.6% of the votes), with the opposition denouncing numerous irregularities and demanding a recount and verification of the votes with the support of several governments and the OAS. Amidst a growing economic crisis and recurrent and sometimes massive demonstrations, the political crisis in Venezuela worsened after the opposition comfortably won the legislative elections in December 2015, winning its first election victory in two decades. This victory caused a certain degree of institutional paralysis between the National Assembly on the one hand and the government and many of the judicial authorities on the other.

There were no massive and continuous anti-government protests in Venezuela, as in previous years, and **the government and the majority of the opposition reached an important political agreement in October, but the country continued to report high murder rates, demonstrations and complaints about the fragile humanitarian and human rights situation while political groups and international organisations criticised the government for setting up obstacles** to political reform that would lead to a presidential election. Although there is no official data on the number of homicides, the Venezuelan Observatory of Violence (OVV) counted 6,973 violent deaths in 2023, one quarter fewer than in 2022 (9,367) and 2021 (9,447) and 75% fewer than in 2016, the year that saw the highest number of violent deaths: 28,475. Although the homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants in 2023 (26.8) was clearly lower than those of 2021 (34.9) and 2022 (35.3), it remained one of the highest in the Americas and was only surpassed by those of Ecuador and Honduras. Furthermore, the OVV figures do not include disappearances, which in 2023

(1,443) were up slightly over 2022 (1,370). Despite the drop in homicides, several analysts warned of the growing role of organised criminal groups in recent years. The 2023 Index of the Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime ranked Venezuela eighth among the countries in the Americas with the highest level of organised crime and last place in terms of the state's capacity to combat it. According to the report, armed organised criminal groups are currently present in at least 22 of the country's 24 states, controlling the drug, gold and human trafficking markets, among other illicit activities, and exercising more social and territorial control in border areas. President Nicolás Maduro announced that 1,844 organised criminal organisations had been dismantled in 2023 and that the number of police officers had increased by 12%, from 160,000 to 179,000. In the middle of the year, the government said that kidnapping cases were down by 54.2% in 2023 compared to 2022.

Regarding the humanitarian and migration situation, the Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants of Venezuela (R4V), made up of UNHCR, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and many other NGOs, indicated that **over half a million people were forced to leave Venezuela in 2023**, climbing from 7,180,000 in January 2023 to 7,720,000 in November 2023. However, according to some sources, the real figure may be even higher. Specifically, the Venezuelan Diaspora Observatory declared that the total number of Venezuelan migrants was about 8.5 million, spread across 90 countries, so that, in the last quarter of a century, Venezuela may have experienced over a 25% drop in population. According to R4V, 85% (6,540,000) of the Venezuelan diaspora is found in countries in the region, mainly in Colombia (44%), Peru (23%), Brazil (8%), Ecuador (7%) and Chile (7%). If the United States is included, this number rises to 90%. The IOM declared that around four million Venezuelans in Latin America were in urgent need of humanitarian assistance and protection in 2023. At the end of 2023, there were more than one million Venezuelan asylum seekers in the world and more than 230,000 Venezuelans recognised as refugees. The Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict (OVCS) reported that 88% of the protests nationwide demanded basic goods and services such as access to water, electricity, fuel, health services and pensions.

According to the OVCS, 6,956 protests were reported in 2023, most of which (5,583) demanded social, cultural, economic and environmental rights, and very specifically labour rights (4,100), while the rest (1,373) defended civil and political rights. The number of demonstrations in Venezuela was slightly lower than in 2022 (7,032) and significantly higher than in 2021 (8,560). Despite the progress made in the negotiations between the government and the Unitary Platform, which are facilitated by Norway, the parties

The Venezuelan Diaspora Observatory reported that the total number of Venezuelan migrants was about 8.5 million

traded accusations at various times during the year. The peak of the tension came in late October, coinciding with the opposition's primaries to elect the person who will run in the 2024 presidential election. According to the opposition, around 2.4 million people participated in the primaries, which gave María Corina Machado 93% of the votes. In 2015, María Corina Machado was disqualified from running for public office for 15 years. However, the government claimed that the primaries had been fraudulent and in late October the Supreme Court invalidated their results. Meanwhile, **the United States warned that it could reinstate the sanctions it had announced it would loosen a few days earlier if the disqualifications against opposition candidates were not withdrawn before 30 November**. Later, in December, two days after the referendum on Essequibo organised by the government, the public prosecutor of Venezuela issued an arrest warrant against 13 people (including prominent leaders abroad, such as Juan Guaidó, Julio Borges and Leopoldo López, and three people from Machado's team), charging them with treason for participating in a national and international conspiracy to boycott the referendum. Another source of acute tension between the government and the opposition was the ruling party majority's renewal of the National Assembly of the National Electoral Council. Even though it has long been made up of a clear majority of people considered close to the government, the opposition criticised the renewal as Caracas' attempt to further control the electoral process, while Human Rights Watch (HRW) expressed concern about the impact that it could have on holding free and competitive elections.

Like HRW, other human rights organisations denounced the human rights situation in the country in 2023. Organisations such as Foro Penal and Justicia, Encuentro y Perdón (JEP) estimate that there are currently between 286 and 319 people incarcerated for political reasons in Venezuela. Amnesty International (AI) said that the use of arbitrary detention for political reasons was part of a government repression strategy and a widespread and systematic attack against the population. Amnesty International argued that Caracas' arrests without court orders, short periods of forced disappearance following arrest, accusation of crimes with a wide margin of discretion, limits on access to the right to defence and use of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading forms of treatment could constitute crimes against humanity. According to Amnesty International, the purpose of arbitrary arrest, directed at political opponents, but also at human rights activists and trade unionists, is to neutralise any perceived threat against the government. In September 2023, the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (MIIV) noted that even though recently human rights have been violated less and such violations target certain groups more selectively, such as union leaders, journalists and human rights activists, there

are still many cases of serious human rights violations in Venezuela and the repressive structure of the state has not been dismantled. Furthermore, according to the MIIV, the government has recently stepped up its efforts to undermine civic and democratic space, increasing its control over civil society organisations, unions, media outlets and political parties and using threats, surveillance, harassment, defamation and censorship to silence and discourage opposition to the government.

Venezuela – Guyana	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government International
Main parties:	Venezuela, Guyana

Summary:
The tension between Venezuela and Guyana over Essequibo, a territory covering almost 160,000 km2 that is rich in minerals and other natural resources, controlled and administered by Guyana, dates back to the lack of agreement in the late 19th century on defining the border between Venezuela and the British Empire. While Guyana, a former British colony, maintains that an arbitral award issued in Paris in 1899 gave the disputed territory to the British Empire, Venezuela protested the ruling and bases its position on the 1966 Geneva Agreement between Venezuela and the United Kingdom (in consultation with the government of Guyana, which won independence from the United Kingdom that same year), by which the parties undertook to resolve the dispute through friendly negotiations. Tension increased significantly after the International Court of Justice declared itself competent to resolve and issue a ruling on the matter in 2020, though Venezuela rejected the ICJ's jurisdiction. Adding to the strain in relations, Guyana granted several companies the right to explore for hydrocarbon deposits in waters disputed with Venezuela and Caracas planned to hold a referendum on the sovereignty of Essequibo in December 2023.

The government of Venezuela's decision to call a referendum on annexing Essequibo (known in Spanish as "Guayana Esequiba", a territory historically claimed by Venezuela, but which is formally under the effective control and administration of the government of Guyana) **and to take action to make its results effective caused a major political and diplomatic crisis in the region, with several countries undergoing significant military mobilisation**. According to Caracas, the turnout for the referendum held on 3 December was around 50% and 95% of the voters selected "yes" on all five questions on the ballot, including whether to reject the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to resolve the territorial controversy over Essequibo; whether to create the state of Guayana Esequiba, grant citizenship to its population and incorporate it into the map of Venezuelan territory; and whether to oppose Guyana's claim to have a

sea pending delimitation. However, several analysts questioned the turnout cited by the government and said that not even Hugo Chávez got more than 10.4 million votes at the peak of his popularity. A few days earlier, the ICJ had issued a ruling urging Venezuela to refrain from any action that would change the situation prevailing in the disputed territory, though without prohibiting the referendum from being held, as previously requested by the government of Guyana, considering that its objective is to prepare the ground for Venezuela's annexation of Essequibo. The ICJ ruling also urged both sides to refrain from taking any action that could aggravate the dispute or make it more difficult to resolve. The ICJ set the hearing for April 2024, when Venezuela should argue and document its position for a substantive resolution of the dispute (which according to some analysts could take years), but at the end of 2023, Venezuela continued to firmly reject the ICJ's jurisdiction and competence to settle the dispute.

Two days after the referendum was held, Nicolás Maduro announced that Essequibo had been incorporated into the official map of Venezuela and that a "human" and "social" care plan had been launched for the population of Guayana Esequiba, with the beginning of a census, the issuance of identity cards and the opening of an office of the Administrative Service for Identification and Migration (SAIME) in the region. Maduro asked Parliament to begin the legislative process to turn Guayana Esequiba into a new state of the republic and announced that the town of Tumeremo (Bolívar state, bordering Essequibo) will provisionally be the headquarters of the Comprehensive Defence Zone (ZODI) and the political and administrative headquarters of the new state, of which Major General Alexis Rodríguez Cabello was appointed as sole authority. Maduro also ordered the creation of the Essequibo division of Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA) and the Corporación Venezolana de Guayana Esequibo (CVG), the creation of a map for exploring for and exploiting resources in the region and the granting of operational licenses for exploring for and exploiting oil, gas and mines in Essequibo. He also gave oil companies authorised by Guyana to operate in disputed waters a three-month grace period to end their activities.

In addition to these decisions**, the government of Venezuela sent a military contingent to Puerto Barima**, in the state of Delta Amacuro, on Venezuela's Atlantic border, very close to Essequibo. The following day, the US conducted air exercises with the Guyana Defence Force and said that it was willing to cooperate to improve Guyana's defensive capabilities. In early January, the US Undersecretary of Defence visited Guyana, giving rise to speculation in Venezuela that Washington was setting up a military base in the region, though Georgetown denied it. Meanwhile,

the governments of Brazil and Suriname mobilised their armies on their respective borders with Guyana. Though both countries showed solidarity with Guyana's position, the border between Brazil and Guyana was delimited through an arbitration treaty and Guyana and Suriname dispute a territorial border in the Tigri region, which is de facto occupied and administered by Guyana. In this sense, some parties in Suriname complained that Guyana had not fulfilled its promises made in the 1960s to demilitarise the Tigri region and had demanded that the government protest diplomatically before the International Court of Justice, CARICOM and the United Nations. The opposition also expressed its desire to hold a referendum similar to the one Venezuela held in December and officially incorporate the Tigri region into the map of Suriname. Military tension escalated in late December when the United Kingdom, a former colonial power in the region, sent a warship to the coast of Guyana. Venezuela considered this an extremely serious and hostile provocation, urged Guyana not to involve military powers in the territorial dispute and began military exercises of considerable magnitude in the Atlantic. In this context, the government of Brazil was concerned about the dynamics of military escalation in the region and said that military demonstrations in support of any of the disputing parties should be avoided and were against the agreement reached by Maduro and the president of Guyana at the bilateral summit organised by CELAC, CARICOM and the Brazilian government in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in mid-December.

Though the diplomatic and military situation escalated in December, there had already been a significant increase in tension between Venezuela and Guyana in the last quarter of the year. In October, the government of Guyana criticised the Venezuelan Armed Forces' troop mobilisation and military manoeuvres near their common border, voiced concern to CARICOM and several of its international allies and placed the Guyanese Armed Forces on alert. Shortly before, the government of Venezuela and the Unitary Platform (which are in negotiations facilitated by Norway) had agreed on the joint defence of Guayana Esequiba in Barbados. Thus, some opposition leaders (such as former presidential candidates Henrique Capriles and Manuel Rosales) said they supported the referendum, while others, including Juan Guaidó and the main opposition leader María Corina Machado, were against it. In fact, Machado asked for the referendum to be cancelled and for a team to be formed to bring the dispute before the ICJ. Two days after the referendum, **Venezuela's public prosecutor issued an arrest warrant against 13 people** (including prominent leaders abroad, such as Juan Guaidó, Julio Borges and Leopoldo López, as well as three people from Machado's team) **on charges of treason for participating in a national and international conspiracy to boycott the referendum.**

2.3.3. Asia and the Pacific

2.3.3.1 Asia

East Asia

China – Japan	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Territory, Resources International
Main parties:	China, Japan, Taiwan, USA

Summary:
China and Japan's dispute over the sovereignty and administration of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands (in Japanese and Chinese, respectively) in the East China Sea dates back to the early 1970s, when the United States, which had administered the islands since 1945, relinquished control of them to Japan. The dispute over the islands, which have a high geostrategic value and are estimated to contain enormous hydrocarbon reserves, is part of China and Japan's conflictive historical relations since the first third of the 20th century as a result of the Japanese invasion of China in the 1930s and the Second World War. The territorial dispute between China and Japan had been managed relatively peacefully since the early 1970s, but tension between the two increased significantly in 2012, when the Japanese government purchased three of the disputed islands from a private owner. In 2013, China unilaterally declared a new Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) that includes the airspace of the islands. In the following years, incursions by Chinese Coast Guard patrol vessels and Chinese vessels into the contiguous and even territorial waters (12 nautical miles from the coast) of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands increased significantly, as did the number of fighters deployed by Japan to control and supervise its airspace. Japan adopted an increasingly assertive national security strategy in the region, notably increased its military spending and consolidated defence alliances with other countries active in the region such as the United States, which has repeatedly expressed its military commitment to Japan's sovereignty and territorial integrity under the bilateral security treaty of 1951. Taiwan (officially the Republic of China) also considers the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands an integral part of its territory for reasons of history, geography and international law, though its policy regarding the dispute has drawn comparatively less international attention and caused less friction with Japan, which controls the islands.

In 2023, tension increased between China and Japan regarding the dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, regarding the number of incidents in the nearby waters and airspace as well as the alliances, strategies and military manoeuvring of both countries in the region. The Japanese government reported that in 2023, a total of 1,287 Chinese government ships operated in the area adjacent to the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands (between 12 and 24 nautical miles) for 352 days, the most since records have been kept (since 2008). According to some Japanese media outlets, in 2024 the Chinese government intends to increase the number of

incursions every day of the year and to authorise the Chinese Coast Guard to conduct on-site inspections of Japanese fishing vessels when it deems necessary. Tokyo also complained that Chinese Coast Guard ships maintained an uninterrupted presence in the contiguous Senkaku/Diaoyu Island area for 134 consecutive days between August and December and even entered Japanese territorial waters (12 nautical miles from the coast) for 42 days. Chinese incursions into the territorial waters of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands have increased substantially in recent years, rising from one between 2009 and 2011 to 23 in 2012 and holding steady at around 30 in recent years. Each time Chinese Coast Guard ships enter the territorial waters of the Senkaku/ Diaoyu Islands, Tokyo sends the Japanese Coast Guard to the disputed area to demand that the Chinese ships leave. Sometimes Tokyo raises a diplomatic protest to Beijing. At various times of the year, but especially between October and December, both countries accused each other of invading the vicinity of the Senkaku/ Diaoyu Islands. Incidents, dangerous manoeuvres and intimidating movements were reported between Chinese and Japanese coast guard patrol vessels and other ships.

In April 2023, the Japanese government declared that between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, it deployed 778 fighters, the vast majority (575) against Chinese aircraft (575) and Russian aircraft (116). Though fewer than the over 1,000 fighters deployed in 2021, some media outlets suggested that the start of the war between Russia and Ukraine caused a drop in the number of Russian aircraft flying near Japan. Since 2013, over 700 fighters on average per year have taken off to monitor Japan's airspace or Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ). For example, in December 2023 Tokyo deployed several fighters in response to the joint flight of 17 Chinese and Russian aircraft near Japan and, shortly thereafter, the joint flight of two Chinese bombers and two Russian bombers over the Sea of Japan. The Chinese government also issued several warnings against Japanese planes flying near the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands during the year. Such incidents have increased exponentially since Beijing included the islands' airspace in its ADIZ in 2013, requiring any foreign aircraft to request authorisation to enter its ADIZ and reserving the possibility of taking emergency defensive action.

At various times during 2023, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida warned that China's growing aggressiveness in the region, as well as Russia and North Korea's military activities, were causing Japan to confront the most dangerous and complex security crisis since the end of the Second World War. Specifically, Kishida accused China of permanently harassing its neighbours in the East and South China Seas and warned that China's military development presents an unprecedented strategic challenge for Japan and the international community. Along these lines, in 2023 Japan strengthened its defence alliances with other countries, increased its military budget and continued to deploy the new national security strategy approved in December 2022, which many analysts interpreted as an important turning point for the self-defence strategy that the country has followed since the end of the Second World War, largely due to the restrictions on defence imposed by the powers that won it. Among other issues, the new security strategy includes the acquisition within 10 years of counterattack capabilities to stop aggression against the country much sooner and at a greater distance, as well as the doubling of its defence spending by 2027, giving it the third-largest military budget in the world, only behind the US and China. In 2023, Tokyo also substantially increased the budget of the Japanese Coast Guard, the government agency most active in controlling the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, and the Japanese Coast Guard, police and Japan Self-Defence Forces (JSDF) conducted exercises to improve coordination between them in the event that Japan suffered an attack and the Japanese Coast Guard had to be integrated into the ministry of defence. Finally, in mid-March Japan deployed the JSDF and missiles on the island of Ishigaki (in Okinawa prefecture), near the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands and Taiwan. The next day, it conducted exercises for the first time to evacuate more than 100,000 people from the islands near Taiwan.

Japan also substantially strengthened its alliances and defence pacts with many actors operating in the region in 2023. In addition to the joint military exercises that it conducts with the US routinely each year and its acquisition of large amounts of war equipment from Washington, Japan and the United Kingdom signed a defence pact in January, the first of its kind with a European country, which includes the possibility of joint military training and exercises and even the deployment of troops in their respective countries. In January, Tokyo announced a strategic partnership with Italy. In January and March, it held its first joint military and air exercises with India. In March, it conducted joint military exercises in the region with the US, Canada, India and South Korea. In October, it carried out joint military exercises with the US and South Korea. In early November, negotiations began between Japan and the Philippines for the deployment of troops in their respective countries. In November, senior Japanese political officials proposed including Japan in AUKUS, the strategic defence alliance between the US, the United Kingdom and Australia. Finally, in December, Japan conducted its first trilateral military exercises with the US and Australia. There was also rapprochement between Japan and NATO. In July, during the NATO summit in Lithuania, both sides announced their intention to increase their cooperation in several defensive areas (such as cybersecurity) and to increase NATO's presence in the Indo-Pacific region, prompting significant criticism from the Chinese government.

China – Philippines	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Territory, Resources International
Main parties:	China, Philippines, USA

Summary:

As part of the conflict between several states in the South China Sea, in recent years the territorial dispute between China and the Philippines that has had the greatest military, political and diplomatic implications has been over two land formations located in the exclusive economic zone of the Philippines (200 nautical miles from the coast, in what the Philippines calls the East Philippine Sea). Beijing claims these territories as its own, as they fall within the "ten-dash line", a region covering approximately 90% of the South China Sea. The first of these territories, Scarborough Shoal, was occupied by the Philippines until 2012, when a naval incident between both countries led China to assume de facto control. The second disputed territory is Second Thomas Shoal (also known as Ayungin in Tagalog and Renai in Chinese), a sandbar in the Spratly Islands that is about 100 nautical miles from the island of Palawan (Philippines) and 620 from China, but only about 20 miles from Mischief Reef, controlled and militarised by Beijing. Since 1999, the Philippines has permanently maintained troops aboard a Second World War ship stranded in Second Thomas Shoal to ensure its control. Alongside the maritime incidents reported in the vicinity of both disputed territories, in 2016 an arbitration tribunal of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) ruled that there was no legal basis for China's appeal to historical rights over resources falling within the "ten-dash line", noted that China had violated the Philippines' sovereign rights over its exclusive economic zone and declared that the disputed geography of the Spratly Islands does not compose an exclusive economic zone, as Beijing argues. However, neither China nor Taiwan recognised the validity of the ruling, asserting that territorial disputes are not subject to the UNCLOS and should be resolved through bilateral negotiations. On several occasions, the US has publicly recalled its military obligations towards the Philippines under their bilateral Mutual Defence Treaty of 1951.

Political and military tension between China and the Philippines increased substantially in 2023, with some of the most serious maritime incidents in recent years, a rise in bellicose rhetoric and the strengthening of defensive alliances between Manila and several countries, especially the US. In early February, Manila reported that the Chinese Coast Guard carried out dangerous manoeuvres less than 140 metres from several Philippine ships and used a military-grade laser against one of its vessels near Second Thomas Shoal, temporarily blinding the crew. According to some media outlets, a laser attack is often considered hostile because it can precede the firing of projectiles at a target. Manila also reported in February that around 30 Chinese vessels remained in its exclusive economic zone and that the Chinese Coast Guard sent radio warnings to several Philippine planes flying over Second Thomas Shoal. The Philippine government summoned the Chinese ambassador for consultations to express

its serious concern over the increasing frequency and intensity of China's activity and what it considered a clear violation of the Philippines' sovereign rights in the West Philippine Sea. **Some analysts think that the Philippine government's decision to publicly reveal China's use of the laser and to summon its ambassador is a turning point in the foreign policy that Manila has pursued thus far, especially under the administration of Rodrigo Duterte**. This strategy, described as "assertive transparency" by some media outlets, mainly consists of openly denouncing Chinese transgressions in its exclusive economic zone and intensifying patrols in the area. Shortly thereafter, in March, Manila reported that over 40 vessels belonging to the Chinese Coast Guard, the Chinese Navy and the Chinese Maritime Militia (fishing boats that according to some analysts operate in coordination with the Chinese authorities) remained in the vicinity of Thitu/Pagasa Island, administered by the Philippines. In late April, Manila stated that more than 100 Chinese vessels were sighted in the region and claimed that several of its coastal patrol vessels almost collided with a Chinese Navy ship. In August, military tension between both countries rose again after the Chinese Coast Guard fired water cannons at Philippine ships on a mission to resupply the grounded Second World War ship BRP Sierra Madre at Second Thomas Shoal. Some analysts believe that the high pressure of water cannons can sink ships and cause serious harm and even death to crew. In October, a Chinese Coast Guard ship collided with a Philippine supply ship about 25 km off Second Thomas Shoal in addition to another collision between a Chinese Maritime Militia vessel and a Philippine Coast Guard ship. Shortly before, a Chinese ship had come within about 320 meters of a Philippine ship southwest of Thitu/Pagasa Island, Manila's largest outpost in the South China Sea. In December, there were two other incidents that the Philippine government considered serious. In the first, Chinese ships used water cannons eight times against Philippine ships on a humanitarian mission to distribute products to fishermen near Scarborough Shoal, controlled by China since 2012. In the second, Manila reported that Chinese ships used water cannons against ships on a resupply mission in Second Thomas Shoal, seriously damaging one of the ships and endangering the lives of its crew. The Philippine Coast Guard said that it was harassed by a total of 13 ships belonging to the Chinese Coast Guard and the Chinese Maritime Militia and that it detected over 48 Chinese vessels in the area, the largest number of maritime forces in relation to supply missions. As in previous incidents in the vicinity of Second Thomas Shoal, the Chinese government said that it had to take legitimate defensive measures after the Philippine supply ships ignored repeated warnings that they had illegally entered the waters adjacent to Second Thomas Shoal, claimed as belonging to Beijing.

Alongside a clear increase in incidents and episodes of conflict between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea, **President Marcos announced his intention to**

modernise and increase the budgetary allocation of the Philippine Armed Forces, citing the challenges facing the county in the South China Sea. Moreover, in 2023 the Philippines significantly boosted its cooperation with various countries that also have territorial disputes with China, such as India, Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia. Particularly noteworthy is Manila's enhanced cooperation on security and defence issues with Australia, the US and Japan. In November, the Philippines and Australia carried out joint maritime and air patrols in the South China Sea for the first time. In 2023, the Philippine and Japanese governments decided to begin negotiations for a Reciprocal Access Agreement aimed at facilitating the accommodation of visiting forces and conducting joint military training activities. The agreement would be Japan's first with an ASEAN member state and the third it has signed in its history after the agreements with Australia and the United Kingdom. Some analysts do not rule out that both countries could even sign a broader pact, such as a Visiting Forces Agreement, similar to the one that the US and the Philippines have had for years, prompting some in the media to describe the current relationship between the Philippines and Japan as a "quasi-alliance". In June, the Philippine, Japanese and US coast guards conducted joint manoeuvres in the South China Sea, the first of this type.

In February 2023, the United States and the Philippines announced a deal to expand their Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) to allow US military access to four additional military installations in the Philippines. Several analysts considered the agreement as one of the most significant recent developments in the relations between the United States and the Philippines and noted that it could have important geostrategic implications for the South China Sea and the East China Sea, as well as for the relations between China and the US. On 3 April, Manila announced the locations of the four additional bases accessible to US forces under the EDCA, three of which are in the north, facing Taiwan, and the other near the Spratly Islands. Washington announced that it would allocate over $100 million by the end of fiscal year 2023 to improve infrastructure at the five existing EDCA sites and support quick implementation of the four new sites. Although Marcos said that the new bases were for purely defensive purposes and should not cause concern to anyone who does not attack the country's national sovereignty and territorial integrity, Beijing warned that the expansion of the EDCA will seriously harm Philippine national interests and endanger regional peace and stability. On several occasions during the year, the US government repeated its military commitment to the Philippines under the 1951 Mutual Defence Treaty. In April, the US and the Philippines carried out the largest joint military exercise ever, involving more than 17,000 troops. In November 2023 and early January 2024, both countries carried out joint patrols from the Taiwan Strait to the South China Sea. Finally, the relationship between both countries

deteriorated following China's publication in August of an updated map of the country that included territorial claims contested by other countries on the western border with India, the South China Sea and Taiwan. The new "ten-dash line," which covers 90% of the South China Sea, includes the entire island of Taiwan (the tenth dash), as well as several small islands and islets claimed by Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Indonesia. The Philippine government claimed that the map was intended to legitimise China's alleged sovereignty and jurisdiction over maritime and territorial areas of the Philippines and asserted that its position had no basis in international law or in the 2016 international arbitration ruling that invalidated China's claims in the South China Sea.

China – Taiwan	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Territory, Resources, System International
Main parties:	China, Taiwan, USA

Summary:
The conflict between the People's Republic of China (China) and Taiwan (officially the Republic of China) dates back to 1949, after the Communist Party of China won the Chinese Civil War (1927-36 and 1945-49) against the government of the Republic of China (created in 1912 and led by the Kuomintang party). This victory led to Mao Zedong's proclamation of the People's Republic of China and the flight of Kuomintang leader Chiang Kai Chek and hundreds of thousands of people to the island of Formosa (Taiwan), where the Kuomintang established authoritarian one-party rule and martial law until the country's democratisation in the late 1980s. Since its creation in 1949, the People's Republic of China has considered Taiwan a rebellious province, refusing to establish diplomatic relations with it and asserting that no country that wants to maintain diplomatic relations with Beijing can recognise Taiwan. On various occasions, different Chinese leaders have expressed their desire to achieve reunification under the principle of "one country, two systems", but they have not ruled out the use of force to do so. The Republic of China, which exercises effective control over Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen, Matsu and smaller islands, maintained that it was the sole legitimate representative of China and its territory until 1991, when it stopped considering the Communist Party a rebel group and recognised its jurisdiction over mainland China. Until 1971, the Republic of China (Taiwan) represented China in the United Nations, occupying a permanent seat on the Security Council. That year, the United Nations recognised Beijing as the sole legitimate representative of China. Washington did the same in 1979 as part of the normalisation of its diplomatic relations. Alongside the political tensions associated with the political status of Taiwan, there have been three significant military episodes. In 1954-55, Beijing bombed the islands of Kinmen, Matsu and Tachen and took effective control of the Yijiangshan Islands, prompting the signing of the Sino-American Mutual Defence Treaty in 1954. In 1958, the People's Republic of China bombed the islands of Kinmen and Matsu again and there was a naval clash between both countries around Dongding Island. In 1995 and 1996, Beijing launched several missiles coinciding with the 1996 presidential election, the first direct election to end authoritarian rule.

In 2023, both China's military pressure on Taiwan and the political tension between both countries rose significantly. This tension was linked to the upcoming presidential election in Taiwan in January 2024, the rise in military cooperation between Taiwan and the US and Taiwan's foreign relations with the US and other countries. **Many Chinese aircraft (1,714) entered Taiwan's Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ),** an area much larger than Taiwan's airspace. Some countries have established ADIZs to have more time to identify potentially hostile aircraft. The most concerning development, however, was the clear rise in airplanes crossing the "median line" between China and Taiwan, a de facto maritime border (though not official or sanctioned by any treaty) drawn in 1955 to minimise the risk of clashes and accidental collisions in the Taiwan Strait. Except for a sporadic incursion stemming from a brief diplomatic incident in 1999, China tacitly respected the median line until 2019. Following the election of Tsai Ing-wen as president of Taiwan in January 2020, Beijing drastically increased its incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ and its crossing of the median line. **While there were 565 crossings of the median line, a few kilometres from Taiwan's territorial waters, in 2022, there were 703 in 2023**.

In September, Taiwan's ministry of defence reported that it had detected a record number of combat Chinese aircraft (103) flying over the airspace around Taiwan in just one day. Throughout 2023, Taipei said that it was detecting between 150 and 200 Chinese ships per month in nearby waters. In response to all this Chinese activity, particular the incursions of Chinese aircraft into Taiwan's ADIZ and the crossing of the median line by Chinese aircraft and ships, **the Taiwanese government deployed its jet aircraft and coast guard ships hundreds of times and even activated its missile system on occasion.**

The frequency, scope and complexity of China's military exercises also increased during 2023. Particularly noteworthy are the military exercises that Beijing held in early April, in which dozens of Chinese fighter jets and warships simulated attacks on Taiwan and surrounded the island. These exercises were a response to the meeting held a few days earlier in the United States by Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen and US House of Representatives Speaker Kevin McCarthy, during which both reaffirmed the solid alliance between the two countries. In late April, Taiwan said that 548 incursions by Chinese aircraft into its ADIZ had been reported during that month. In July, China also conducted exercises with fighters, bombers and warships south and southwest of the island. A few days later, Taiwan held its annual military exercises. In April, China sent a drone around Taiwan for the first time. It did so again five more times over the course of the rest of the year. Some analysts also warned of the growing presence of Chinese aircraft carriers in the Pacific Ocean, from

Many Chinese aircraft (1,714) entered Taiwan's Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ)

where planes take off in the direction of the eastern coast of Taiwan, which is much less protected than the western one, and carry out military exercises to repel the United States in the event of an invasion of Taiwan. During the year, the United States, Taiwan and other countries complained of China's growing aggressiveness towards ships conducting freedom of navigation operations in international waters. In June, for example, the governments of Canada and the United States reported that two of their ships sailing through the Taiwan Strait nearly collided with a Chinese warship due to its dangerous manoeuvring. **Washington said that the Chinese Army has become more aggressive against US surveillance aircraft in the Pacific, carrying out more than 180 risky interceptions (300 if other countries are included) since 2021, more than in the entire previous decade**.

Another source of tension throughout the year was **the rise in military cooperation between the United States and Taiwan**. In February, for example, several media outlets reported Washington's intention to increase the number of troops deployed in Taiwan from the current 30 to between 100 and 200. At around the same time, a US bicameral congressional delegation met in Taipei with President Tsai and both parties pledged to continue strengthening defence ties. A few days later, Taiwan's foreign minister and the Secretary General of the Taiwanese National Security Council met in Washington with the Undersecretary of State and other senior US government officials to discuss military cooperation between the two countries. In addition to the many contracts signed between the government of Taiwan and US companies to modernise or enhance Taiwan's military capabilities and Washington's approval of several military aid packages for Taiwan, in July the US House of Representatives and in December the Senate passed a law allowing substantial expenditure to boost Taiwan's defensive capabilities, including military training and exercises, greater interoperability with US forces and greater cooperation between both countries on cybersecurity and military intelligence. The law also stipulates a report that the secretary of defence must submit semi-annually to Congress on China's military activities in Taiwan, South-east Asia, and the South China Sea. **In 2023, Taiwan's defence spending reached a record high of more than $19 billion, but experts in the field estimate that China spends about twelve times more than Taiwan on its military**. Taiwan has about 169,000 active troops (and about two million in reserve), while China's military has over two million active troops, the most in the world. In August, during a meeting with MPs from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, President Tsai asked if Taiwan could participate in the NATO Centres of Excellence in the Baltic countries, which address issues such as cybersecurity, communications and energy security.

Finally, **the presidential election in Taiwan in January 2024 also gave rise to escalating rhetoric and Chinese military pressure on Taiwan**, increasing the number of ships crossing the median line and planes entering Taiwan's ADIZ. On a rhetorical level, at the end of the year the Chinese government declared that Taiwanese independence would mean war, and Xi Jinping once again repeated that Taiwan's reunification with China was a historical inevitability during his end-of-year speech. Beijing also said that the results of the election would not change the fact that Taiwan is a non-negotiable part of China. Beijing has considered Taiwan a rebel province since 1949. In fact, some analysts believe that tension between China and Taiwan has reached its peak since 1996, when Beijing fired missiles off the coast of Taiwan during Taiwan's first democratic elections to end the Kuomintang's decades of authoritarianism.

Korea, DPR – Rep. of Korea	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Korea DPR, Rep. of Korea

Summary:

After the end of the Second World War and the occupation of the Korean peninsula by Soviet troops (north) and US troops (south), it was split into two countries. The Korean War (1950-53) ended with the signing of an armistice (under the terms of which the two countries remain technically at war) and the establishment of a de facto border at the 38th parallel. Despite the fact that in the 1970s talks began on reunification, the two countries have threatened on several occasions to take military action. As such, in recent decades numerous armed incidents have been recorded, both on the common border between the two countries (one of the most militarised zones in the world) and along the sea border in the Yellow Sea (or West Sea). Although in 2000 the leaders of the two countries held a historic meeting in which they agreed to establish trust-building measures, once Lee Myung-bak took office in 2007 the tension escalated significantly again and some military skirmishes occurred along the border. Subsequently, the death of Kim Jong-il at the end of 2011 (succeeded as supreme leader by his son Kim Jong-un) and the election of Park Geun-hye as the new South Korean president at the end of 2012 marked the start of a new phase in bilateral relations.

Alongside the rise in political and military tension between North Korea and the United States and Pyongyang's notable weapons development during 2023, several analysts indicated that relations between North Korea and South Korea reached their tensest and most delicate stage of development in recent years. Although there were no significant episodes of war between the two countries, Kim Jong-un warned of the possibility of war on the Korean Peninsula on several occasions.

Relations between North Korea and South Korea reached their tensest and most delicate stage in recent years, according to various analysts

Furthermore, both countries' suspension of a 2018 agreement to improve bilateral relations in November hindered any contact or negotiations and paved the way for more militarisation and belligerent incidents on the land and maritime border. In January, tension rose significantly after South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol warned that his country could develop its own nuclear weapons if the nuclear threat from North Korea persisted or increased, adding that South Korea's scientific and technological capabilities gave reason to believe that such weapons would be developed quickly. Previously, Kim Jong-un had promised an exponential increase of North Korea's nuclear arsenal during 2023 in response to the threat posed to his country by the US and South Korea. In late January, the United Nations Command (UNC), the UN mission under US jurisdiction that has monitored the armistice since 1953, concluded an investigation indicating that both North and South Korea had violated the 1953 armistice by deploying drones across the border (in late December, North Korea sent five such drones into South Korean airspace, prompting Seoul to send another drone to North Korea). Later, in April, the South Korean Armed Forces fired warning shots to expel a North Korean patrol vessel that crossed the Northern Limit Line (NLL), the de facto maritime border between the two countries drawn by the UNC at the end of the Korean War (1950-53). South Korea has patrolled the waters around the NLL for decades because North Korea does not recognise the NLL and considers the border to be in waters controlled by South Korea. During the operation to expel the North Korean ship, a South Korean patrol boat collided with a nearby Chinese fishing boat due to poor visibility, causing minor injuries to part of the South Korean crew.

The episode with the greatest political impact of the year occurred in late November, when North Korea launched a military reconnaissance satellite into orbit after two failed attempts in 2023 and Seoul responded by resuming aerial surveillance along the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) and **partially suspending the agreement signed in 2018** by Kim Jong-un and South Korean President Moo Jae-in during a time of rapprochement between North Korea and South Korea, as well as between North Korea and the US. The next day, Pyongyang completely pulled out of the agreement, officially known as the Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula, which some analysts consider the highest expression of the prospects for achieving the reunification and denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula through dialogue. Among other issues, the agreement provided for transforming the DMZ into a zone of peace, completely ceasing all hostile acts on land, air and sea as of 2 May 2018, jointly designing a plan to turn the areas around the NLL in the West Sea into a maritime zone

of peace to avoid accidental military clashes and ensure safe fishing activities and periodically holding military meetings at the highest level, including between the defence ministers of both countries. The 2018 agreement also reaffirmed the Non-Aggression Agreement, which excludes the use of any form of force against each other, called for disarmament to be carried out gradually as military tension eased and substantial progress was made in building military trust and confirmed the common goal of achieving a Korean Peninsula free of nuclear weapons. Both countries were committed to actively holding trilateral meetings with the United States or quadrilateral meetings with China with a view to declaring the end of the war and establishing a permanent system of peace on the Korean Peninsula, as well as to take confidence-building action (such as by establishing a joint liaison office to facilitate dialogue between authorities, jointly managing humanitarian issues and the programme for reuniting families separated by war, jointly participating in international sporting events and connecting and modernising railways and border roads).

At the end of the year, Kim Jong-un declared that his government would no longer seek or accept any type of dialogue about reunification and reconciliation, claiming that South Korea was the country's main enemy and that Seoul only sought "unification by absorption". The North Korean leader ordered the elimination of symbols of inter-Korean reconciliation (for example, he demanded the demolition of a monument in honour of the dream of reunification in Pyongyang) and the abolition of concepts such as "reunification", "reconciliation" and "compatriots" from the country's national history. North Korea also cut cross-border railways and eliminated government agencies managing relations and dialogue with South Korea. Kim Jong-un also asked the legislative assembly to rewrite North Korea's Constitution to specify that the country will seek to "occupy, subjugate and claim" South Korea as part of North Korean territory if another war breaks out on the Korean Peninsula and said that the North Korean Armed Forces would completely annihilate the US and South Korea if North Korea were provoked. In fact, in his usual speech at the end of the year at the Workers' Party congress, he said that war could break out on the Korean Peninsula at any moment.

Korea, DPR - USA, Japan, Rep. of Korea[66]	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government International
Main parties:	DPR Korea, USA, Japan, Rep. of Korea, China, Russia

Summary:
International concern about North Korea's nuclear programme dates back to the early 1990s, when the North Korean government restricted the presence in the country of observers from the International Atomic Energy Agency and carried out a series of missile tests. Nevertheless international tension escalated notably after the US Administration of George W. Bush included the North Koreann regime within the so-called "axis of evil". A few months after Pyongyang reactivated an important nuclear reactor and withdrew from the Treaty on the Non Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in 2003, multilateral talks began on the nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula in which the governments of North Korea, South Korea, the USA, Japan, China and Russia participated. In April 2009, North Korea announced its withdrawal from the said talks after the United Nations imposed new sanctions after the country launched a long range missile.

Alongside the notable deterioration of inter-Korean relations, tension clearly rose during the year between North Korea and several countries (especially the United States, South Korea and Japan) over Pyongyang's weapons programme. Other causes of concern included the growing defence cooperation between North Korea and Russia, the South Korean government's demands regarding the development of nuclear capabilities, the increase in joint military exercises between the US and South Korea and the strengthening of the trilateral military alliance between the US, Japan and South Korea. At the end of 2023, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un noted that it had been a year of great transformation and progress in Pyongyang's weapons development. **In addition to the launch of several short- and medium-range ballistic missiles over the course of the year, the two highlights were the launch of intercontinental ballistic missiles and the sending of a military reconnaissance satellite into orbit. Five tests were conducted with intercontinental ballistic missiles in 2023, three of which used the Hwasong 18 model, the most powerful weapon in North Korea's nuclear arsenal according to Kim Jong-un.** Such missiles are propelled with solid fuel (which are much more difficult to detect than those that run on liquid fuel) and, according to some analysts, can transport a nuclear warhead and reach a distance of about 15,000 kilometres, striking many different targets in the United States. According to these analysts, the test that Pyongyang carried out in December, at an altitude of about 6,000 kilometres, was the most successful. Previously, Pyongyang's release of photos of a nuclear warhead casing prompted speculation about the progress it has been making in its ability to miniaturise nuclear warheads so they can be attached to ballistic missiles. North Korea's second most notable technological leap of the year was its launch into orbit of a military reconnaissance satellite in late November, one of the five military priorities for the five-year period 2021-2026 announced by Kim Jong-un in January 2023. Although the South Korean government was sceptical about the progress that the

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66. This international socio-political crisis affects other countries that have not been mentioned, which are involved to varying degrees.

satellite technology could represent, some analysts suggest that its successful operation could be a turning point in North Korea's ability to obtain information about military resources and strategies from South Korea and the United States. Pyongyang made two previous attempts to launch the satellite in May and August, both times drawing criticism from the international community on the grounds that it contravened several UN Security Council resolutions. The fact that the satellite was launched shortly after a meeting in Russia between Kim Jong-un and Russian President Vladimir Putin led to speculation that the Russian government may have collaborated in developing the satellite launch technology. According to this speculation, the North Korean government had provided considerable ammunition for Russia's war against Ukraine, as US intelligence sources confirmed in October. In addition to consulting on satellite launches, some analysts indicate that Pyongyang would also be interested in collaborating with Russia to obtain nuclear submarines, modernise its fighter fleet and obtain surface-to-air missiles. Before the meeting between Kim Jong-un and Putin, the Russian defence minister had travelled to Pyongyang in July to attend the events of the 70th anniversary of the armistice of the Korean War (1950-1953), together with a member of the Chinese Politburo, in one of the highest-ranking visits to North Korea in recent years. In October, the Russian foreign minister met with the North Korean leader, while in November the Russian minister of natural resources met in North Korea with the North Korean minister of foreign economic relations to sign an agreement on joint geological exploration in North Korea.

On several occasions, the President of South Korea expressed his country's willingness to develop its own nuclear capabilities to confront the North Korean weapons programme

Another source of greater tension on the Korean Peninsula was the deepening of South Korea's military cooperation with the United States and Japan, both bilaterally and trilaterally. In August, a summit was held in Camp David (USA) for the trilateral alliance between the leaders of South Korea, the United States and Japan in which they pledged to further extend their military cooperation, share intelligence information, coordinate their responses and policies regarding North Korea and hold an annual summit-level meeting for the Trilateral Indo-Pacific Dialogue. In February, October and December, the three countries conducted joint military exercises, in some cases in response to missile launches by North Korea. Relations between South Korea and Japan, historically harmed by the Japanese Empire's annexation of the Korean Peninsula between 1910 and 1945, were also notably strengthened during the year. The top leaders of both countries, who met in Tokyo and Seoul in March and May, respectively, agreed to compensate some of the victims of the colonial era, strengthen their military cooperation and improve integration of their respective defence systems.

In late April, the United States and South Korea issued their joint Washington Declaration after the summit between US President Joe Biden and South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol, during which both leaders promised to strengthen their historic defensive alliance (which marked its 70th anniversary in 2024), develop US deterrent capabilities on the Korean Peninsula, boost the magnitude of their joint military exercises, deploy nuclear submarines in South Korean ports and especially create the **Nuclear Consultative Group** (NCG). This group, which met twice during the year, **aims to give a greater role to the South Korean government in the US nuclear strategy on the Korean Peninsula and to provide an outlet for Yoon Suk-yeol's desire, expressed several times, for South Korea to develop its own nuclear capabilities to confront the North Korean weapons programme**. After the Washington Declaration was issued in April, the United States sent a nuclear submarine to the South Korean port of Busan twice, in June and December. The United States and South Korea conducted some of the largest military naval, land and air exercises in recent times in 2023, with those held in March (Freedom Shield), May and June (the largest ever carried out near the border) and August (Ulchi Freedom Shield) standing out especially for their magnitude. Finally, military tension rose between North Korea and the US in the middle of the year. In July, North Korea threatened to shoot down US reconnaissance planes that it claimed had crossed the demarcated maritime border and entered its exclusive economic zone. In mid-August, Pyongyang deployed military aircraft in response to what it considered a new US incursion into its exclusive economic zone, calling it militarily provocative.

South Asia

Afghanistan - Pakistan	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government International
Main parties:	Afghanistan, Pakistan

Summary:
Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have historically been characterised by complexity and disputes over the borderline established during the British colonisation of Pakistan known as the Durand Line, which divided the Pashtun population. In 1996, the Islamic Emirate was established in Afghanistan. It was governed by the Taliban, a religious and military movement formed in 1994 by men who had trained in religious schools in Pakistan and promoted by the Pakistani secret services. Pakistan was one of the few countries to recognise the Taliban government of Afghanistan. Following the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and the fall of the Taliban regime, Pakistan sided with

the US government, though the Taliban continued to receive Pakistani support and established important operational bases in Pakistan. Although Pakistan always officially denied having helped the Taliban, parts of the government, the secret services and the Pakistani Armed Forces provided them with logistical, military and political support during the two decades of armed conflict and foreign military presence in Afghanistan. With the return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan in 2021, the government of Pakistan pressured the new Afghan authorities to exercise control over the Pakistani Taliban insurgency, the armed group TTP. The Afghan Taliban government tried to mediate between the Pakistani government and the TTP, but after the negotiations failed, tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan increased.

Throughout 2023, tension between the two countries increased, with some episodes of violence on the border, constant diplomatic clashes and the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees from Pakistan. Following the breakdown of the ceasefire agreement between the government of Pakistan and the Pakistani Taliban armed group TTP in November 2022 and the escalation of violence in Pakistan during 2023, the Pakistani government stepped up pressure on the Taliban government of Afghanistan, demanding that it halt its support for the insurgency. Afghanistan had offered to act as a mediator and facilitated contact between the Pakistani government and the TTP. However, after the negotiations failed, the Pakistani government accused the Afghan government of allowing the TTP to operate from Afghan soil to carry out its attacks against the Pakistani security forces. Given the Afghan government's refusal to take action against the TTP, claiming that it is an internal Pakistani problem, tension escalated between both governments. In October, there was a considerable spike in tension when Pakistan announced a plan for the mass deportation of foreigners, designed specifically for the Afghan population. The announcement came after fighting between Pakistani security forces and the TTP in Chitral, on the border between both countries, in which four soldiers and at least 12 insurgents were killed. Between three and four million Afghans reside in Pakistan, 600,000 of which arrived from Afghanistan following the Taliban's return to power in 2021. According to the International Crisis Group, 1.3 million Afghans are legally registered as refugees and 850,000 have an Afghan Citizen Card that grants them some protection. However, nearly two million people do not have any documentation authorising their residence in Pakistan, and this figure could be higher due to the porosity of the borders between both countries, which makes frequent population movement easy. After the plan was announced, people began to get deported and return voluntarily in the face of threats from the Pakistani government of expropriation, detention and punishment, even for Pakistanis providing support to Afghan people living in the country illegally. By the end of the year, 500,000 people had been deported to Afghanistan in highly vulnerable conditions, as the

Pakistani authorities limited the amount of livestock and money that returnees could bring to a value of $175.

In November, Pakistan's interim Prime Minister Anwaar ul Haq Kakar, charged with leading the country until the elections scheduled for the first quarter of 2024, claimed that Afghanistan's Taliban government was supporting the TTP insurgents, which had contributed to the escalation of violence in Pakistan. This accusation was unprecedented due to its lack of ambiguity. Kakar is considered close to the Pakistani Armed Forces and demanded that Afghanistan hand over those responsible for committing acts of terrorism in Pakistan, noting that although Pakistan hoped that the change in Afghanistan's government would lead to peace, it had increased TTP violence in Pakistan. His assertions were denied by the Afghan government, which in turn demanded that the Pakistani authorities behave in accordance with the "principles of Islam" in an attempt to stop the forced return of tens of thousands of people. In addition to the deportations, the government of Pakistan also increased obstacles to trade, which could have a serious impact on the frayed Afghan economy, which is already facing one of the most serious humanitarian crises in the world. The return of hundreds of thousands of people to Afghanistan may also be having a significant impact on the humanitarian situation in the country, though the Afghan government announced the establishment of camps to receive the returnees.

India (Manipur)	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Identity, Self-government Internal
Main parties:	Government, armed groups (PLA, PREPAK, PREPAK (Pro), KCP, KYKL, RPF, UNLF, KNF, KNA)

Summary:
The tension that confronts the government against the various armed groups that operate in the state, and several of them against each other, has its origin in the demands for the independence of various of these groups, as well as the existing tensions between the various ethnic groups that live in the state. In the 1960s and 70s several armed groups were created, some with a Communist inspiration and others with ethnic origins, groups which were to remain active throughout the forthcoming decades. On the other hand, the regional context, in a state that borders with Nagaland, Assam and Myanmar, also marked the development of the conflict in Manipur and the tension between the ethnic Manipur groups and the Nagaland population which would be constant. The economic impoverishment of the state and its isolation with regard to the rest of the country contributed decisively to consolidate a grievance feeling in the Manipur population. Recent years saw a reduction of armed violence.

Tension escalated in the Indian state of Manipur, with clashes between members of the Meitei and Kuki

communities that claimed 163 lives, according to figures compiled by the South Asia Terrorism Portal. In October, the International Crisis Group noted that at least 176 people had died as a result of violence since the socio-political crisis escalated in May, making it the highest associated death toll since 2009. The violence also forcibly displaced more than 67,000 people. The crisis began after the Manipur High Court directed the government to consider "scheduled tribe" status for the state's Meitei population, the majority ethnic group in Manipur, which is Hindu and lives in the capital and flat parts of the state. The ruling was opposed mainly by the Kuki and Naga minority communities, which live in the mountainous areas of the state and are mostly Christian. Among other issues, "scheduled tribe" status provides access to reserved quotas in jobs and public services. The High Court's ruling also allowed the Meitei to acquire land in areas inhabited by the Kuki, which increased Kuki fears of losing territorial control. After learning of the High Court's ruling, the organisation All Tribal Students' Union Manipur called for protests in 10 mountainous districts of the state, where the majority of the Kuki population lives. During **the protests, there were riots and clashes between protesters and the police in which many people were injured**. Houses were also burned by Meitei militias made up of thousands of people. As a result of the violence, a curfew was established and the Indian Army was deployed with orders to shoot without warning. In addition, 20,000 people were evacuated, including Meitei who lived in predominantly Kuki areas and vice versa. These evacuees were transferred to camps for displaced people.

In July, a video went viral showing scenes of sexual violence perpetrated by a group of Meitei men against two women from the Kuki community, triggering new clashes and riots. The video had not previously been released as a result of Internet restrictions that the Indian government imposed after the May riots. Many women spoke out in defence of the victims. Multiple complaints subsequently emerged about other cases of sexual violence and the police were accused of complicity with the perpetrators. Human rights organisations also noted that fake news had spread about sexual violence against Meitei women, leading to an intensification of unrest. There were no formal complaints of sexual violence against Meitei women, whereas over a dozen cases of sexual violence against Kuki women were reported. As a consequence of the violence, segregation between the Kuki and Meitei communities increased significantly, drastically reducing the areas inhabited by people from both groups. In the following months, violence and clashes continued. The police, made up mainly of members of the Meitei community, accused the federal security body Assam Rifles of supporting the Kuki insurgency in the state and the Meitei increased their demands for the government to withdraw Assam Rifles from Manipur. In March, the Indian government ended the ceasefire agreement that it had upheld since 2008 with the Kuki armed groups Kuki National Army and Zoumi Revolutionary Front, accusing both insurgent groups of being behind the social protests that had taken place in the districts of Churachandpur, Kangpokpi and Tengnoupa, demanding that the state respect tribal land rights.

India – China	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↓
Type:	Territory International
Main parties:	India, China

Summary:
The border shared by China and India has been disputed since the 1950s, after the partition of India and Pakistan and the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. This border has never been formally delimited by an agreement between the two countries and there are several areas whose demarcation is a source of conflict. In the western part of the border, the dispute revolves around the uninhabited Aksai Chin area, whose territory is claimed by India, which considers it part of the Ladakh region (part of Jammu and Kashmir) and is administered by China as part of the Xinjiang region. China's announcement of the construction of a highway linking Xinjiang with Tibet through the Aksai Chin region increased tension with India, which was exacerbated after the Dalai Lama was granted asylum in India in 1959. In the years that followed, there were troop movements by both countries in the area. In 1962, a war began that ended with India's military defeat, but the issue of demarcation was left unresolved and continued to shape relations between both powers and with other countries in the region, especially Pakistan. In 1988, both governments agreed to resolve the dispute peacefully. However, since then no progress has been made in the negotiations and the military tension in the disputed areas has persisted. There was a serious escalation of tension in 2020, with the first direct fighting between the armies of both countries in which 20 Indian soldiers died.

Tension between both countries did subside throughout the year and despite political and military talks at different levels, no positive progress was made. Though there were no direct clashes or any episode of escalation of the crisis as had happened in 2022, the tension remained and different analysts said there were risks that it could rise on a large scale. The risk factors include both countries' enormous military deployment, as well as the military structures that have been built since the 2020 crisis and the development of infrastructure by both countries to enable rapid troop deployment in case military tension escalates again. The International Crisis Group estimated that between 50,000 and 60,000 Chinese troops are deployed in the area, with the possibility of adding 120,000 more soldiers within a week.[67] India has 50,000 soldiers in the area and has deployed heavy weaponry. Political and military talks

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67. International Crisis Group, *Thin Ice in the Himalayas: Handling the India-China Border Dispute*, Asia Report no. 334, 14 November 2023

continued throughout the year, but no agreement was reached for the complete military withdrawal from the disputed areas where military buffer zones have been agreed to prevent a direct clash between both armies. Twenty rounds of high-level military talks have been carried out since the crisis broke out in 2020, but none of those that took place in 2023 made any real progress, though both sides agreed to continue them. In addition to the technical military dialogue, some high-level political meetings took place during the year, such as the informal conversation between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping during the BRICS summit in South Africa in late August. After this meeting, the Chinese president said that the border dispute did not reflect all bilateral relations between the two countries. Days after the BRICS summit, however, China published a new standardised map of its territory that included areas disputed with India in Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin. India responded by discrediting China's border demarcation. President Xi did not attend the G20 summit in New Delhi, which India hosted for the first time. It was also the first time that a Chinese president did not attend this summit that brings together the 19 largest economies in the world and the EU. Xi's absence at the G20 summit showed the gap between both governments and the risk of escalating tension, though many media outlets described the summit as a diplomatic success for Modi. Though there were no serious military incidents during the year, there were some episodes of tension. In April, the Indian home minister announced more resources for security in Arunachal Pradesh in response to China's construction of many towns in areas near the Actual Line of Control, the de facto border between both countries. The Chinese government makes settlers in these newly built "model towns" participate in joint patrols in areas near the border. In July, the Indian authorities said that China had pitched some tents in the eastern Ladakh military buffer zone, which were removed following Indian protests.

South-east Asia

Indonesia (West Papua)	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Self-government, Identity, Resources Internal
Main parties:	Government, OPM armed group, political and social opposition, Papuan indigenous groups

Summary:
Although Indonesia became independent from Holland in 1949, West Papua (formerly Irian Jaya) was administered for several years by the United Nations and did not formally become part of Indonesia until 1969, following a referendum considered fraudulent by many. Since then, a deep-rooted secessionist movement has existed in the region and an armed opposition group (OPM) has been involved in a low-intensity armed struggle. In addition to constant demands for self-determination, there are other sources of conflict in the region, such as community clashes between several indigenous groups, tension between the local population (Papuan and mostly animist or Christian) and so-called transmigrants (mostly Muslim Javanese), protests against the Freeport transnational extractive corporation, the largest in the world, or accusations of human rights violations and unjust enrichment levelled at the armed forces.

Many clashes between the state security forces and the armed opposition group OPM continued to be reported in 2023, in addition to complaints of significant human rights violations as part of the Indonesian Armed Forces' counterinsurgency strategy and accusations that the OPM had attacked the civilian population. According to official government data, there were 209 incidents of political violence in Papua in 2023 in which 79 people died, including 37 civilians, 20 soldiers, three police officers and 19 members of armed groups. According to these same figures, the body count increased over the previous year, when 53 people lost their lives. According to other sources, the conflict was more intense. **The research centre ACLED noted that 187 events of political violence were reported in 2023, which caused 152 fatalities, notably more than in 2022**, when 81 people were killed in 104 episodes of violence. In 2022, the violence had already started to climb significantly, as a clearly higher number of civilians died (43) than in the two preceding years (27 and 28, respectively). According to the authorities, the area of Papua that experienced the highest number of violent incidents in 2023 was Yahukimo Regency, in Highland Papua Province. According to several human rights organisations, in September 2023 more than 76,000 people had been internally displaced by the conflict, significantly more than the estimated 60,000 at the beginning of the year. In March 2022, the United Nations stated that between 60,000 and 100,000 West Papuans had been forced to leave their homes since 2018. The dynamics of the conflict in 2023 remained in line with trends observed since 2018. Though the insurgency had observably stepped up its attacks in previous years (from 11 in 2010 to 52 in 2017), several analysts argue that the turning point came in 2018, firstly with the OPM's declaration of war against the Indonesian government, which also called for more attacks against foreign companies operating in Papua, and secondly with the murder of 19 construction workers in December 2018 in Nduga Regency (Highland Papua Province). According to these analysts, OPM armed attacks have increased in number, frequency, sophistication, lethality and territorial reach since then, after having historically been largely limited to the central highlands of the region (especially in the regencies of Puncak Jaya and Mimika, in Central Papua Province, and in the regency of Lanny Jaya, in Highland Papua Province). As such, they have expanded to areas traditionally less affected by the insurgency, such as Pegunungan Bintang, Intan Jaya, Yahukimo, Deiyai and Keerom.

One of the violent events with the greatest political impact in 2023 was an OPM attack in early February against an Indonesian light plane that had landed in Nduga Regency and the subsequent kidnapping of its five Indonesian passengers and pilot from New Zealand. The passengers were immediately released, but the OPM held the pilot hostage (he had not been released by the end of 2023) and publicly demanded that the government recognise Papua's sovereignty and end Indonesian colonialism in the region. They also demanded that several countries stop selling weapons to and training the Indonesian Armed Forces. The plane in question, which was set on fire, had been transporting material to the Timika area (where one of the largest gold and copper mines in the world operates) and was trying to evacuate 15 construction workers who had received death threats from the OPM. The workers were rescued by the Indonesian Armed Forces the day after the attack on the plane. In mid-April, the OPM declared that it had killed 15 soldiers in Nduga Regency during an ambush on a military contingent tasked with rescuing the kidnapped New Zealander pilot, though days later the government only acknowledged that five soldiers had died. In another significant incident of violence in early October, the military said five rebels were killed during a military operation in the mountainous Serambakon region of Highland Papua Province. Days later, in mid-October, the government declared that seven people were killed and 11 others wounded following an OPM attack against an illegal gold mine in Serdala, Yahukimo Regency. The OPM said that the mine workers were spies for the Indonesian Armed Forces and that they had warned civilians to leave the area before the attack. In late August, two workers were killed and seven were wounded following an OPM attack on a gold mine in Pegunungan Bintang Regency.

Thus, **the Indonesian government and some human rights organisations reported an increase in the OPM's threats and attacks against civilians in recent years**. Particularly noteworthy is the murder of activist Michelle Kurisi in late August in Lanny Jaya Regency (Highland Papua Province), claimed by the OPM in a statement in which it alleged that the victim had collaborated with the security forces and had engaged in espionage activities, including information related to the release of the kidnapped New Zealand pilot. In mid-August, Jakarta declared that three people (two of them government workers) died in an OPM attack on the truck in which they were travelling in Nduga Regency. At various times during the year, the OPM warned that foreign citizens in the region could be targeted by their actions and announced their intention to increasingly target certain aircraft landing in the region. During the year, in addition to the aforementioned attack in mid-February, the OPM carried out several attacks against aircraft. In March, the Indonesian airlines Wings Air and Trigana Air suspended their operations at the airport in Yahukimo Regency (Highland Papua Province) after an aircraft with 66 passengers on board was attacked by the OPM. In April, the OPM shot at a small plane that was landing in Intan Jaya Regency (Central Papua Province). In July, the OPM attacked a plane carrying military personnel at Pogapa Airport, also in Intan Jaya Regency.

Both the OPM and local and international human rights organisations said that the human rights situation was becoming worse in West Papua during 2023 and urged the government and the international community to reverse the trend. On 5 May 2023, **five Special Procedures of the United Nations Human Rights Council initiated correspondence with the government of Indonesia regarding cases of violence, including extrajudicial killings in West Papua**. Later, in early July, the UN Secretary-General's Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide expressed her concern about the human rights situation in Papua at the United Nations Human Rights Council, mentioning harassment, arbitrary arrest and land grabbing and encouraging the government of Indonesia to guarantee access to humanitarian assistance. In August, several human rights organisations called on the government to make some commitments to human rights in light of its bid to be elected as a member of the Human Rights Council for the 2024-2026 period. Such commitments could include fully cooperating with the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council, eradicating impunity, guaranteeing the safety of human rights activists, allowing foreign journalists and international observers to access the region and ratifying several international human rights documents, especially the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Forced Disappearance (ICPPED). Also in mid-August, a human rights organisation based in Germany, Human Rights Monitor, reported that the Indonesian Armed Forces may have committed crimes against humanity in the counterinsurgency operations they conducted in September and October 2021 in the Kiwirok district, where they used helicopters, drones and heavy weapons. Both the OPM and some human rights organisations accused Jakarta and the Indonesian Armed Forces of significant human rights violations in the region in 2023. In late February, nine people were killed and 14 were injured in the city of Wamena (the largest in Highland Papua Province) during a police and military operation to break up protests sparked by rumours of the kidnapping of a child. In September, five children apparently shot to death were found at the mouth of the Brasa River, in Dekai, the capital of Yahukimo Regency (Highland Papua Province). The Indonesian Army said that they died during its fighting with the OPM, yet the OPM claimed that the deceased were civilians and not members of their group. Some civil society organisations reported that around 20 people were injured during a demonstration in Jayapura, the largest city in West Papua, to mark the 61st anniversary of the New York Agreement in 1962, which made Indonesia's annexation of Papua possible. According to these organisations, dozens were arrested in 2023 during the many demonstrations that took place throughout Papua in favour of the self-determination of the region and against human rights violations in Papua.

2.3.3.2 The Pacific

Papua New Guinea	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Identity, Resources, Territory, Self-government Internal
Main parties:	Government, community militias, Government of Bougainville

Summary:
In recent decades, high levels of intercommunity, clan and tribal tension and violence have been reported in various regions of Papua New Guinea, a country made up of more than 600 islands and with great cultural diversity (more than 850 languages are spoken). Most of this intercommunity violence, which especially affects the provinces of Enga, Hela, Southern Highlands and Western Highlands, is linked to conflicts over land tenure (a very high percentage of which is regulated by customary law), though historically there have also been episodes of violence related to other issues, such as control of resources, family and clan rivalries and accusations of witchcraft and black magic, which have caused the death of dozens of people. Community tensions get worse around elections (as happened in 2022) and are becoming deadlier due to growing access to firearms. In addition, the regions most affected by intercommunity violence are among those that suffer from the highest rates of poverty, the lowest levels of formal education and the absence and fragility of institutions related to security, law enforcement and access to justice and conflict resolution.

A significant increase in community, clan and tribal violence was reported in various parts of the country in 2023, especially in the province of Enga, in the Highlands region. According to ACLED, 208 people were reportedly killed in Enga, clearly more than in 2022 (58) and 2021(52). However, some sources maintain that the real body count is closer to 300. According to several media outlets, tribal clashes throughout August caused the death of around 150 people. Other major episodes of community violence in Enga were reported in January, when Sangu, Mun and Malee community militias attacked the municipality of Tole, killing 11 people and kidnapping another 11; in March, when 44 people were killed in clashes between Pyakaili clans; in June, when clan fighting in the Wapenamanda district caused the death of 10 people; in July, when clashes involving the Kaekin and Sikin tribes against the Ambulin, Antiokon, Lungupin and Saus communities claimed 15 lives; in November, when fighting between the Maimai and Pokale clans resulted in an unknown death toll and the declaration of the Wapenamanda and Wabag districts as war zones, with an imposed curfew; and in December, when episodes of violence involving around 15 tribes and the Sau Walep and Itiokon Neninein clans claimed around 30 lives. Episodes of community violence were also reported in neighbouring provinces in the Highlands region during 2023. ACLED reported a body count of 44, adding that 347 people died in outbreaks of political and community violence in the country as a whole. According to the New Guinean

police, although clan and tribal-related clashes have been a historical reality in certain parts of the country, the intense violence and lethality observed in recent years is related to the development and outcome of the 2022 elections and to greater access to sophisticated weapons. Specifically, the police said that while a rise in violence is common during election periods, in last year's elections, certain communities were more aligned with certain local candidates, more patronage practices were detected and there were rumours and accusations of ballot box stuffing and fraud and bribery in counting the votes. The authorities said that while fighting in the past was done with very rudimentary weapons, **they have recently observed a greater use of automatic and sophisticated firearms. The regional authorities also cited the increasing use of "mercenaries" or people from outside the conflict zone who had been hired to participate in certain attacks.** In this regard, the police reported the deaths of at least 20 non-local people who had participated in the spiral of violence in Enga. The authorities also noted that the increase in drug trafficking from Indonesia could also be a factor in the rise in violence and the involvement of foreign mercenaries. They explained other impediments to preventing and ending community violence, such as the geographical dispersion of the population, the difficulty in accessing certain regions and especially the lack of police (in Enga, there are around 200 police officers serving about 300,000 people). The government deployed additional police forces in Enga and pledged to enact the legislative reforms to provide the state security forces with the resources and powers necessary to deal with what it described as "domestic terrorism". The high levels of violence drew much criticism from the opposition and several parties involved in the ruling coalition withdrew their parliamentary support for the government.

2.3.4. Europe

Eastern Europe

Belarus	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, social and political opposition, EU, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, United States, Ukraine, NATO, Russia

Summary:
The former Soviet republic of Belarus achieved its independence in 1991 and became a presidential republic. Since 1994 it has been governed by Alexander Lukashenko, whose presidential powers and term limits were extended in referenda in 1996 and 2004. With a centralised economy inherited from the Soviet era and energy-dependent on Russia, Belarus has oscillated between a strategic alliance

with Russia and a policy of affirmation of its national sovereignty that has brought it through stages of crisis with its large neighbour. The Lukashenko regime's political authoritarianism and violation of human rights has left little room for political and social opposition, while driving low-intensity tension at the same time. In 2020, Lukashenko's re-election sparked massive anti-government protests. The regime's massive crackdown on the demonstrations set off a serious political and social crisis. The war in Ukraine, triggered by Russia's invasion in 2022, which was assisted by Russian troops deployed in Belarus, increased tension inside Belarus and between it and Ukraine and Western actors.

Tensions remained high, as the repression unleashed since the serious electoral crisis of 2020 continued alongside rising militarisation in the country, influenced by the war in Ukraine and the tension between Russia and Euro-Atlantic actors. In January, the Belarusian defence ministry announced the arrival of more troops, weapons and equipment, raising alarms about the risks of a new war front in Ukraine if Russia attacked from Belarus, as it did at the start of the invasion in 2022. However, this did not come to pass. In any case, Belarus continued to host Russian troops and training camps in 2023, with estimates of the number of troops varying between one and several thousand. In January, the Belarusian Army carried out joint military exercises with Russia in Belarus. Ukraine continued to denounce Russia's use of Belarusian airspace to launch drone and missile attacks. In February, Belarusian President Alexander **Lukashenko ordered the creation of a territorial defence force**, with volunteers that the defence ministry estimates will have between 100,000 and 150,000 members. Lukashenko warned that in the event of aggression, the country would respond severely and quickly. In April, Belarus asked Russia for security guarantees. In June, **Belarus and Russia announced Russia's first deployment of "tactical" nuclear weapons in Belarus**. Russian President Vladimir Putin warned in July that any attack on Belarus would be tantamount to attacking the Russian Federation.

After Wagner Group's failed armed uprising in Russia in June, its leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, and thousands of his mercenaries marched to Belarus as part of the conditions imposed on it by the Kremlin, with Lukashenko's alleged intermediation. Ukraine counted around 5,000 Wagner Group fighters in Belarus in July. Some analysts indicated that their arrival caused social tension and some opposition, even in the Belarusian Armed Forces.[68] The Belarusian defence ministry and Wagner Group reported conducting joint military training near the Polish border in July. In any case, some

Belarus and Russia announced the deployment of Russian "tactical" nuclear weapons in Belarus

analysts said that after Prigozhin's death in August,[69] there were significantly fewer Wagner Group troops and some media outlets estimated it had one thousand mercenaries at the beginning of 2024.

At the same time, **political and military tension increased between Belarus, on the one hand, and Poland, Lithuania and Latvia, on the other**. Poland responded to the arrival of Wagner Group fighters in Belarus and to the joint military exercises near its the border with Belarus by deploying around one thousand troops there, according to some media outlets. Latvia also sent troops to the Polish border area. Poland warned that it was prepared for different scenarios and that it could close the border with Belarus and the enclave of Kaliningrad if the situation became critical. On several occasions, Poland and Belarus accused each other of violating their respective airspaces. Lithuania closed two border crossings with Belarus in August and revoked the residence permits of 910 Belarusian citizens and 254 Russian citizens on the grounds of threatening national security. In addition, the migrant population was used politically, attacked and dehumanised as part of the dispute between Belarus and Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. Poland deployed additional troops, expelled migrants and put forward the securitization narrative that Belarus was sending migrants to Poland to destabilise it. HRW reported that the Polish authorities conducted illegal summary expulsions of migrants and asylum seekers arriving from Belarus, sometimes using violence to do so. As reported by HRW, migrants, including minors, remained trapped on the Belarusian border and faced serious human rights violations by Belarusian agents as well as the risk of death.[70] In May, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants, Felipe González Morales, published a report on his visit to Belarus in 2022 and his assessment of the rights situation of migrants on the Belarusian-Polish border. The report concluded that the border situation reflected the geopolitical crisis in the region and criticised the use of migrants as a political tool.[71]

In relation to the dispute between the government and parts of the population over political and civil rights and freedoms, 1,500 people remained imprisoned on politically motivated charges in 2023, according to HRW's annual report.[72] This number included human rights activists, journalists, lawyers, trade unionists, political opponents and others. According to HRW, the authorities increasingly subjected prisoners to solitary confinement, torture and other forms of mistreatment. There were many acts of persecution during the year.

68. Harhalyk, Tatsiana, "What are Wagner Group mercenaries still doing in Belarus?", *DW*, 25 January 2024.
69. The leader of the Wagner Group died in August when the plane he was traveling in crashed, killing ten people. Many analysts blamed Prigozhin's death on the Russian government.
70. Human Rights Watch, "Belarus", in *World Report 2024*, HRW, 2024.
71. Human Rights Council, *Visit to Belarus - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Felipe González Morales, HRC*, A/HRC/53/26/Add.2, 18 May 2023.
72. Human Rights Watch, "Belarus", in *World Report 2024*, HRW, 2024.

In August, the Supreme Court ordered the dissolution of the political party Belarusian Popular Front and the United Civic Party. Overall, according to some analysts, the authorities had dissolved all opposition parties and some pro-regime parties, and by the end of the year the number of political parties had fallen from 11 to four.[73] In November, Lukashenko announced parliamentary and local elections for February 2024. Through an amendment made to the Constitution in 2022, the creation of a People's Assembly of Belarus, a new body that will have authority over all branches of government, was also planned for 2024.[74]

Moldova	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, political opposition, Russia, EU, Ukraine, NATO

Summary:

Moldova proclaimed itself an independent republic in 1991 during the dissolution of the USSR. Historically, its current territory to the left of the Dniester River was part of the mediaeval principality of Moldavia, which also included parts of present-day Romania and Ukraine. It went through stages when it was under the control of different powers, including the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire, Romania and the USSR. During World War II and after the non-aggression pact between the USSR and Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia established the Moldovan SSR in 1940 (which would become one of the fifteen Soviet Socialist Republics that were part of the USSR) uniting part of the historical region of Bessarabia and Transdniestria, a territorial strip east of the Dniester River that was formerly part of an autonomous region of the Ukrainian SSR. Today a country of 2.6 million inhabitants with an absolute poverty rate of 24.5% (2021), Moldova is beset by tension in different intersecting areas. For instance, it has an unresolved conflict over the status of Transdniestria, an area with a Russian-speaking majority that has been de facto independent since 1992, supported by Russia and internationally recognised as part of Moldova. The country has also been affected by instability and political division, including in relation to its outlook on foreign policy, and serious corruption problems. It has maintained neutrality with respect to NATO, though it also has a cooperative relationship with the military alliance. Tension between Russia and Moldova has increased at different periods, including in the energy sphere, as Moldova has traditionally been dependent on Russian gas. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 increased tension and uncertainty in neighbouring Moldova due to the risks of the conflict spreading.

The multidimensional tension rising since the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 continued. During the year, the critical situation in Moldova included alarms raised by the government and allied international actors, such as Ukraine, the EU and the US, about the risks of hostile Russian action against Moldova; government action against local political actors and media considered pro-Russian; warnings from Russia to Moldova; and hostile actions between them, such as the expulsion of diplomats. Some NGOs worried about the risk of violations of human rights such as freedom of expression due to the government's shutdown of media outlets considered pro-Russian. In February, Moldova reported two violations of its airspace by Russian missiles fired from the Black Sea and aimed at Ukraine, as well as the impact of Russian missile fragments on its territory.

In February 2023, based on intelligence shared by Ukraine, Moldovan President Maria Sandu reported Russian plans for a coup in Moldova by individuals with military experience from Russia, Belarus, Serbia and Montenegro who would infiltrate as civilians and seize government buildings. According to Sandu, the coup attempt expected to have the support of local groups such as the pro-Kremlin opposition Shor party, led by magnate and politician Ilan Shor, sentenced in April 2023 *in absentia* for massive fraud in the banking system in 2014 (in a case in which financial and political actors of other stripes were also found guilty). In the closing months of 2022, fears of the risk of outside interference had increased due to the anti-government protests staged by the Shor party in September, which lasted until 2023, demanding the resignation of the Moldovan government and president. Moldova denied entry to the country to a team of boxers from Montenegro and made several arrests in March. In June, the Moldovan police warned that Russian intelligence services were using protests promoted by the Shor party to destabilise the country. Russia denied allegations of a plot against the Moldovan government. The protests in the first few months of 2023 were limited in scope, with between a few hundred and a few thousand people participating, including pensioners opposed to price hikes. There were also smaller protests against the change of the official name of the country's language, from "Moldovan" to "Romanian". This change was made in March through a bill promoted by the government and passed on the second reading with 58 votes of the 101 MPs. Some analysts said that it was mistake and sent a negative message to the population that identifies as Moldovan.[75]

In June, **the Constitutional Court of Moldova ordered the dissolution of the pro-Russian opposition party Shor**, declaring it unconstitutional, in a ruling that determined that the party acted against the principles of the rule of law and that it posed a threat to the country's sovereignty and independence.[76] The ruling was ratified by the court in September and made final and unappealable. In June, the leader of the party, Ilan

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73. Shraibman, Artyom, "Belarus Gears Up for Elections and Powerful New People's Assembly". *Carnegie*, 14 November 2023.
74. Ibid.
75. De Waal, Thomas, "Time to Get Serious About Moldova", *Carnegie Europe*, 11 May 2023.
76. Novaya Gazeta Europe, "Moldova: pro-Russian Șor Party ruled unconstitutional", *Novaya Gazeta*, 19 June 2023.

Shor, announced the creation of a new political bloc, "Şansă, Obligaţii, Realizări" (SOR), bringing together various parties ahead of the upcoming local elections in November 2023, the presidential election in 2024 and the parliamentary elections in 2025. Shor party candidate Eugenia Gutul won the runoff election to be governor of the Gagauzia region in May 2023.

In July, Moldova ordered the expulsion from the country of 18 Russian diplomats from the diplomatic corps of the Russian Embassy and another 27 people from the technical corps, leaving only 10 diplomats and 15 technical personnel remaining. Moldova claimed that it had acted according to alleged hostile actions by Russia. The expulsion occurred after a new report was published that identified 28 antennas in the Russian diplomatic buildings in the country, located next to the headquarters of the Moldovan president, Parliament and government. In response, Russia announced a ban on 20 Moldovan representatives from entering the country.

In the local elections in November, the ruling party (PAS) won around 40% of the votes, but did not carry the large cities, such as the capital, where Ion Ceban, of the Miscarea Alternativa Nationala (MAN) party, was re-elected. A week before the local elections, the Moldovan authorities suspended the licenses of six TV channels owned or affiliated with Ilan Şhor and Vladimir Plahotniuc, an oligarch and former leader of the Democratic Party who fled the country in 2019 on charges of corruption, including in the massive fraud of 2014. They also blocked 31 websites, including Tass and Interfax. Moldova's Security and Intelligence Service accused them of spreading false information and the government said it was a response to what it considers Russia's hybrid war against Moldova. **Various Moldovan NGOs (Centre for Independent Journalism, the Electronic Press Association, RISE Moldova, Access-Info Centre and others) voiced concern about the measures given what they considered insufficient explanations of the legal circumstances and facts.** Days before the elections, the National Emergency Situations Commission disqualified the Şansă party, a member party of the SOR bloc. Created in 2020 and previously known as "Ai Noştri", it renamed itself Şansă during the creation of the SOR bloc, which it joined. Şansă's disqualification prevented 652 candidates from running. The OSCE noted that the elections were calm and that most candidates could campaign freely, but that the broad powers of the National Emergency Situations Commission were used to restrict freedom of expression and association and the freedom to run for election.[77] The OSCE also expressed concern about foreign interference and allegations of vote buying during the campaign. In April, the EU established a new civilian mission in Moldova, the European Union Partnership Mission in

the Republic of Moldova (EUPM Moldova), in response to Moldova's request for support. The mission aims to "reinforce crisis management structures" and build resilience to "hybrid threats", including cybersecurity, information manipulation and interference from "foreign agents". In December, the EU approved the start of negotiations for the accession of Moldova, after having received candidate country status in 2022. Also in December, the Moldovan Parliament approved a new national security strategy that identifies Russia as a threat and replaces the previous one, from 2011. The strategy had the support of 59 votes out of a total of 101 seats. Tension around the dispute with the Transdniestria region also remained high throughout the year.[78]

Moldova (Transdniestria)	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	=
Type:	Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Moldova, self-proclaimed Republic of Transdniestria, Russia, Ukraine

Summary:
Transdniestria is a 4,000 km^2 enclave with half a million inhabitants that are mostly Russian-speaking. Legally under Moldovan sovereignty, but with de facto independence, since the 1990s it has been the stage for an unresolved dispute regarding its status. The conflict surfaced during the final stages of the breakup of the USSR, when fears increased in Transdniestria over a possible unification between the independent Moldova and Romania, which have both historical and cultural links. Transdniestria rejected Moldovan sovereignty and declared itself independent. This sparked an escalation in the number of incidents, which eventually became an armed conflict in 1992. A ceasefire agreement that same year brought the war to an end and gave way to a peace process under international mediation. One of the main issues is the status of the territory. Moldova defends its territorial integrity, but is willing to accept a special status for the entity, while Transdniestria has fluctuated between proposals for a confederalist model that would give the area broad powers and demands full independence. Other points of friction in the negotiations include cultural and socio-economic issues and Russian military presence in Transdniestria. The issue of Transdniestria is one of the lines of tension in a broader scenario of fragility in Moldova, a former Soviet republic and one of the poorest countries in Europe, which is affected by political division running along a pro-EU and pro-Russia fault line and by a history of corruption problems. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 increased uncertainty in the Transdniestria region and across Moldova, which borders Ukraine.

Tension remained high in the Transdniestria region, influenced by the war in neighbouring Ukraine and the risks of the conflict spreading. In February, Russia threatened Moldova with a scenario like that in Ukraine

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77. OSCE, "Moldova's elections peaceful and efficient, but marred by sweeping restrictive measures amid national security concerns: international observers", *OSCE*, 6 November 2023.
78. See the summary on Moldova (Transdniestria) in this chapter.

if it tried to resolve the dispute over the status of the Transdniestria region by force and warned Moldova against its calls for the "demilitarisation" of the region. Furthermore, in rhetoric reminiscent of that used by Russia in Ukraine to justify the invasion, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned that they would defend Russian citizens living in Moldova in the event of any risk coming from Moldova, the USA or the EU. In the presentation of the new government's priorities in February, new Prime Minister Dorin Recean had mentioned the withdrawal of Russian troops from Transdniestria and the demilitarisation of the strip. According to analysts, other priorities for the government included the search for a diplomatic solution that would restore full Moldovan sovereignty over Transdniestria. The Moldovan government urged calm in the face of Russian warnings about a possible military scenario. In February, Moscow revoked a 2012 decree that reflected the concept of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation at that time ant that explicitly stated Russia's commitment to seek ways to resolve the Transdniestrian issue on the basis of respect for Moldova's sovereignty, territorial integrity and neutral status. The 2012 decree also suggested the development of closer relations with the US and the EU. In March, Moscow unveiled its new concept of foreign policy and the leaders of Transdniestria highlighted the concept's clause of support for the security of Russia's allies.

Other moments of tension during the year included complaints by the Transdniestrian authorities in March of an alleged Ukrainian plan to assassinate representatives of the region through a car bomb attack next to a presidential motorcade in the capital. The Kremlin accused Ukraine of preparing provocations as part of a plan to invade the region. The government of Moldova and the media said there was a lack of evidence for the accusations and Ukraine rejected them, describing them as provocations directed by Moscow. Moldova was concerned about military manoeuvres conducted by the Russian peacekeeping forces in Transdniestria in April that had not been announced in advance. According to Moldova, the manoeuvres breached the terms of the system regulating the buffer zone. Russia maintains around 1,500 troops in Transdniestria, some as part of the trilateral peacekeeping forces (Moldova, Transdniestria and Russia) and some as members of the Operational Group of Russian Forces (OGRF), considered illegal by Moldova. Moldova also carried out military exercises near Transdniestria in December.

Moldova's reform of the penal code, with amendments approved by Parliament in February, was another cause for confrontation between the parties to the conflict. The approved changes provide punishment for funding and inciting "separatism", conspiring against Moldova and obtaining or stealing information that could harm the sovereignty, independence and integrity of the country. Throughout the year, the Transdniestrian authorities criticised the reform and complained of the lack of guarantees for their representatives. In response to a request from the OSCE mission to Moldova, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) released a statement on the reform, warning that classifying "separatism" as a criminal offence risked criminalising the mere expression of ideas and could be used as a pretext to suppress peaceful demonstrations or opinions on different territorial arrangements, autonomy or even independence. The statement also included a series of recommendations.[79] In developments inside Transdniestria, a prominent Transdniestrian political opposition leader, Oleg Khorzhan, was assassinated in July. The leader of the Communist Party in Transdniestria since 2004 and a member of the region's Parliament between 2010 and 2019, he had been critical of the local de facto authorities and imprisoned between 2018 and 2022. Moldovan human rights NGOs urged the Moldovan government to investigate his death. Moldova asked the OSCE for support to investigate the case.

During the year, various analysts warned of the challenges faced by Moldova and Transdniestria in the new context opened since the war in Ukraine. At the end of 2023, **Transdniestria's population and economy were still dependent on Russian gas, but the future continuity of the gas transit contract between Russia and Ukraine**, which expires in December 2024, was in doubt. Some analysis said that the termination of this agreement or the lack of alternatives could set off an economic shock and a humanitarian crisis in the disputed region.[80] Meanwhile, Moldova continued to be dependent on electricity from Transdniestria produced with Russian gas. Other challenges were related to Moldova's EU accession process, having reached candidate country status in 2022 and having received approval for negotiations to start in December 2023, and how the unresolved dispute over Transdniestria will affect and be affected by that process.[81] Meanwhile, peace negotiations between Moldova and Transdniestria continued to face many obstacles, also due to the influence of the war in Ukraine.[82]

79. ODIHR, *Comments on the criminalization of "separatism" and related criminal offences in Moldova*. Opinion-Nr.: CRIM-MDA/490/2023, 4 December 2023.
80. Ibragimova, Galiya, "Is Moldova Ready to Pay the Price of Reintegrating Transnistria?". *Carnegie*, 24 January 2024; Ceban, Evghenii, "Time is running out to solve Moldova's Transnistria question". *Open Democracy*, 23 August 2023.
81. Ibid.
82. See the summary on Moldova (Transdniestria) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

Russia and the Caucasus

Armenia – Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh)	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Self-government, Identity, Territory International
Main parties:	Azerbaijan, Armenia, self-proclaimed Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia, Türkiye

Summary:

Armenia and Azerbaijan faced various dimensions of interstate tension. On one hand, they have had a dispute over the sovereignty of Nagorno-Karabakh, a territory historically inhabited by a predominantly local Armenian population and that was integrated by the USSR in 1923 as an autonomous region within Azerbaijan. In the late 1980s, the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh and their local authorities began a campaign to join Armenia. Preceded by incidents and civil violence since 1988, amidst the decomposition of the USSR and the independence of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the tension around Nagorno-Karabakh escalated into an armed conflict between Azerbaijan and the local forces of the enclave, that were supported by Armenia. It ended with a ceasefire in 1994. In that war, Nagorno-Karabakh's forces took control of the enclave and the seven surrounding districts, which belonged to Azerbaijan and whose Azerbaijani population was expelled. More than 24,000 people (over 30,000, by some estimates) died and more than a million people were displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia and Azerbaijan. A peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the years that followed failed to resolve the conflict. Since the 1994 ceasefire, there have been several escalations of violence, such as in 2016, which claimed several hundred lives. The conflict resumed in 2020 with an Azerbaijani military offensive and a 44-day war, in which Baku recaptured the districts around Nagorno-Karabakh and a third of the enclave. Several thousand people were killed and tens of thousands were displaced. A cessation of hostilities agreement was reached, which authorised the deployment of Russian peacekeeping troops, but left the political status of the disputed territory unresolved. Azerbaijan launched a new one-day military offensive against Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023, which led to the exodus of its Armenian population and by which Baku forced the reintegration of the enclave into Azerbaijan. Meanwhile, Baku and Yerevan continue to disagree on the delimitation of their border and the opening of transport routes, aggravated by their historical hostility over Nagorno-Karabakh. The political dispute has been punctuated by cross-border incidents of violence.

Three years after the war of 2020, an Azerbaijani one-day military offensive in September led to the exodus of almost the entire population of Nagorno-Karabakh, amounting to over 100,000 people, and the enclave's forcible reintegration into Azerbaijan. In 2023, before the military offensive, incidents of violence occurred on the interstate border and between the forces of Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh, which blamed each other for several fatalities and injuries. In response to a request from Armenia, the EU deployed a civilian observation mission on the Armenian side of the border with Azerbaijan (EUMA) in February, taking over from EUMCAP (October-December 2022). Azerbaijan and Russia criticised the establishment of the mission. Despite its deployment, border incidents continued to occur between Armenian and Azerbaijani security forces, claiming several lives and wounding others. In addition to these armed hostilities, in the months prior to the September military offensive, the Lachin corridor remained blocked. It was the only route connecting Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia and had been closed in December 2022 by alleged Azerbaijani environmental activists, while Armenia blamed Azerbaijan, whose government does not tolerate independent protest. Azerbaijan set up a military checkpoint in the corridor in April 2023. **UN experts urged Azerbaijan to lift the blockade, which caused an emergency humanitarian situation**, with serious restrictions on basic goods, including food and medicine, and impacts on the running of medical centres and schools, which worsened as the months dragged on.[83] Since mid-June, it blocked all transport of humanitarian products and periodically prevented the ICRC from passing through, according to HRW.[84] Baku also cut power and gas lines, causing blackouts.[85] In August, the UN Security Council held an emergency session on Nagorno-Karabakh, requested by Armenia, invoking Article 35(1) of the United Nations Charter.

Tensions escalated in September. **Azerbaijan launched a military offensive on Nagorno-Karabakh. After 24 hours of clashes, the authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh capitulated and signed a complete cessation of hostilities agreement, facilitated by Russia and written under the terms imposed by Azerbaijan**. The agreement included the withdrawal of all the Armenian Armed Forces present in Nagorno-Karabakh, which the Armenian government claimed did not exist, and the full dissolution and disarmament of the Nagorno-Karabakh Armed Forces. Estimates put the death toll at several hundred on 19 and 20 September (around 200 Azerbaijani soldiers, according to the defence ministry, approximately 200 soldiers from Nagorno-Karabakh, according to the region's emergency services spokesperson, and 10 civilians, including 5 minors, according to the Ombudsman of Nagorno-Karabakh). The Ombudsman of Nagorno-Karabakh claimed that another 400 people were wounded, including around 40 civilians, 13 of them children. At least other 218 people died and 120 were injured in an explosion and fire at a petrol depot around which hundreds of vehicles had gathered to refuel and flee to Armenia. The authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh blamed the explosion on a failure to comply with safety regulations. **Azerbaijan's military offensive forcibly displaced almost the entire Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh**. In early October,

83. OHCHR, "UN experts urge Azerbaijan to lift Lachin corridor blockade and end humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh", *OHCHR*, 7 August 2023.
84. Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2024*, 2024.
85. Ibid.

around 100,500 people had already moved to Armenia. A UN mission visited parts of Nagorno-Karabakh on 1 October and noted that according to their interlocutors, only between 50 and 1,000 remained in the region. The previous estimated population was 120,000.

In the days after the cessation of hostilities, meetings took place between representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan that addressed humanitarian issues, disarmament and the integration of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh, at least some of them without agreement. Nagorno-Karabakh's President Samvel Shahramanyan issued a decree on 28 September dissolving the self-proclaimed republic, by which it would cease to exist on 1 January 2024. Some incidents and violations of the cessation of hostilities took place in the weeks following the offensive.

In parallel, between late September and early October, Azerbaijan arrested several political and military leaders of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. Azerbaijan presented its integration plan in early October, which encompassed five spheres (legal and administrative sphere; security; economy; social sphere; culture; education and religion), claiming that it contained guarantees of educational, cultural, linguistic and religious rights. However, the plan contrasted with Baku's belligerent actions and rhetoric and with the lack of guarantees of rights in Azerbaijan itself, as well as the uncertain prospects for the right of return of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh. On 15 October, the Azerbaijani president visited the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh, Stepanakert, dressed in military fatigues, raised the flag of Azerbaijan, stepped on the flag of the extinct republic of Nagorno-Karabakh at the former headquarters of its government and gave a triumphalist speech accusing international mediators of a decades-long lack of interest in resolving the conflict and of preferring to freeze it.

Anti-government protests took place in Armenia against what was considered Armenia's inaction during Azerbaijan's military offensive and its consequences, with demands for the resignation of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. In late October, Shahramanyan reneged on the document dissolving the region. **Representatives of the Nagorno-Karabakh government promoted the idea of establishing a government in exile, but it was rejected by the Armenian authorities**. Relations between Armenia and Russia seriously deteriorated, as Russia did not condemn the Azerbaijani offensive and its peacekeeping forces in Nagorno-Karabakh did not intervene.

An Azerbaijani military offensive led to the dismantling of the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh republic, its forcible reintegration into Azerbaijan and the forced exodus of virtually its entire Armenian population

After the invasion, Armenia and Azerbaijan maintained their dialogue regarding the normalisation of relations, though with difficulties.[86] At different times, Armenia indicated the risks of new Azerbaijani military operations leading to the forcible seizure of parts of Armenia, including to connect the Azerbaijani enclave of Nakhchivan with the rest of the country. Between October and December, there were some incidents on the border between both countries, killing one person and wounding several others. In December, the EU agreed to boost the number of EUMA troops from 138 to 209. Meanwhile, the **International Court of Justice ordered Azerbaijan to take urgent and mandatory provisional action under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination**, and in response to Armenia's request to the Court for action. The required action included ensuring that people who have left Nagorno-Karabakh and wish to return can do so safely, guaranteeing that people who wish to stay are safe from the use of force or intimidation that could force them to flee and protecting and safeguarding the identity documents, records and private property of the affected persons. The ruling, dated 17 December, required Baku to submit a report on the action to take within eight weeks.

South-east Europe

Serbia – Kosovo	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Self-government, Identity, Government International[87]
Main parties:	Serbia, Kosovo, political and social representatives of the Serbian community in Kosovo, UNMIK, KFOR, EULEX

Summary:
The socio-political crisis between Serbia and Kosovo is related to the process of determining the political status of the region after the armed conflict of 1998-1999, which pitted both the KLA (Albanian armed group) and NATO against the Serbian government following years of repression inflicted by Slobodan Milosevic's regime on the Albanian population in what was then a province of Serbia within the Yugoslav federation. The NATO offensive, unauthorised by the UN, paved the way for the establishment of an international protectorate. In practice, Kosovo was divided along ethnic lines, with an increase in hostilities against the Serb community, whose isolationism was in turn fostered by Serbia. The territory's final status and the rights of minorities have remained a constant source of tension, in addition to Kosovo's internal problems, such as

86. See the summary on the Armenia-Azerbaijan negotiating process (Nagorno-Karabakh) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024. .
87. The socio-political crisis between Kosovo and Serbia is considered "international" because even though its international legal status is still unclear, Kosovo has been recognised as a state by more than a hundred countries.

unemployment, corruption and criminality. The process of determining this final status, which began in 2006, failed to achieve an agreement between the parties or backing from the UN Security Council for the proposal put forward by the UN special envoy. In 2008, Kosovo's parliament proclaimed the independence of the territory, which was rejected by the Serbian population of Kosovo and by Serbia. In 2011, the parties began a new negotiating process facilitated by the EU with the support of other actors. However, the political dispute between Serbia and Kosovo continues, as does the political and social tension between the institutions of Kosovo, on the one hand, and political and social actors and the Kosovo Serb population, on the other hand, with intermittent expressions of violence.

Tension increased between Serbia and Kosovo and in northern Kosovo, including with violent incidents. Despite the progress made in the negotiating process early in the year, with Kosovo and Serbia's verbal support for the Agreement on the path of normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia, on 27 February, and its implementation annex, on 18 March, political and social tension continued in the following months, along with obstacles in the negotiations.[88] The main party in the Serb-majority areas of northern Kosovo, Srpska Lista, called for a boycott of the April municipal elections of the four northern Kosovo municipalities. It had made its participation conditional on the establishment of the association of Serbian-majority municipalities in Kosovo, a substantive issue in the negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo and delayed by Pristina, and on the withdrawal of special police units in northern Kosovo. Without their participation, the elections only had a turnout of 3.4%. They were won by Kosovo Albanian parties, which took office amid heavy police deployments and some clashes, while Belgrade put the Serbian Army on alert and ordered the deployment of troops near the border with Kosovo. **Post-election protests were staged in late May, with serious incidents of violence that injured over one hundred people, including Kosovo Serb protesters, police and KFOR forces**. After the clashes, NATO announced the deployment of 700 more troops to boost the mission. It also placed an additional battalion of reserve forces in highest state of "combat readiness". The US and the EU imposed some sanctions on Kosovo. The EU urged the Kosovo government to take action to de-escalate the crisis, including withdrawing special police operation units from the surroundings of municipal facilities and calling early elections in those towns. New incidents and clashes were reported in June. In July and August, Kosovo withdrew part of the special police units, but other actions such as calls for new elections were still pending.

Tensions escalated again in September. On 24 September, Kosovo reported that around 30 paramilitary fighters ambushed a police patrol in Banjska (northern Kosovo, 15 km from the border with Serbia) and later took refuge in the town's Orthodox monastery. One police officer and three assailants were killed and the Kosovo authorities seized heavy weapons, explosives and uniforms. Kosovo accused Serbia of organising the assault, which the Kosovo authorities said was aimed at annexing northern Kosovo. Belgrade denied any involvement. The US ambassador to Kosovo noted that the attack had been coordinated and sophisticated, that the attackers appeared to have military training and that the amount of weaponry suggested there was a plan to destabilise security in the region. Washington had yet to determine whether Serbia was responsible for it. In late September, Srpska Lista Vice President Milan Radoičić claimed responsibility for the attack, claiming to have planned the operation without support from Serbia, and resigned from his position in the Kosovo Serb party. He was arrested in Belgrade and released, with Serbia saying that he would be prosecuted. Kosovo demanded his extradition and Interpol issued an arrest warrant for him and 18 other people in December. NATO sent several hundred additional troops to Kosovo after the attack. In November, NATO said that it was considering permanently increasing its troops. The attack on 24 September presented a towering new challenge due to its magnitude. It also took place in a tense local context onto which the international dispute between Russia and Euro-Atlantic actors is also projected. The UN Secretary-General's October report warned that the growing tensions in Kosovo continued to erode the fragile trust between communities and between institutions and communities, and therefore announced that the UN mission would prioritise confidence-building initiatives and inter-community exchanges. Around 20 civil society organisations from Serbia and Kosovo warned of the profound impact that the violence of 24 September had on the deteriorated relations inside Kosovo, inside Serbia and between both, and in October they jointly called for peacebuilding and the normalisation of relations in the region and urged the authorities at all levels to support the building of links and cooperation within and between Kosovo and Serbia.[89] International actors with a third-party role in the negotiating process urged Kosovo and Serbia to resume it,[90] saying that a new escalation could happen otherwise.

2.3.5 Middle East

The Gulf

Iran	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition

88. See the summary on Serbia-Kosovo in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.
89. VVAA, *Renewing commitments to the cause of peace*, 26 October 2023.
90. See the summary on the Serbia-Kosovo negotiating process in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

Summary:
The tension is framed in a decades-long context of political polarisation between conservatives and reformists in Iran and is characterised by the key role played by religious authorities and armed forces in the future of Iran, particularly the Republican Guard. The internal tension worsened in mid-2009, when President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was re-elected in elections described as fraudulent by the opposition that led to the largest popular protests in the country since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The end of Ahmadinejad's two consecutive terms and the rise to power of the moderate cleric Hassan Rouhani in 2013 seemed to open a new era in the country, raising expectations about a possible drop in domestic political tension and a potential change in Iran's relations with the outside world. However, the internal tensions persisted. Recent protest movements, especially in 2019, 2022 and 2023, have put a spotlight on political and social unrest among the Iranian population and have been harshly repressed by the regime.

After the mass demonstrations sparked by the death of the young Kurdish woman Mahsa Amini in police custody in 2022[91] and the regime's harsh crackdown that may have caused the death of 500 people,[92] **in 2023 the Iranian authorities persisted in their repressive policies to quell the protests.** The action taken by Tehran to confront the movement known by the slogan "Women, Life, Freedom" led to fewer protests in public spaces than in the previous year (over 1,600 demonstrations were reported between mid-September and early December 2022) and many human rights violations. Several NGOs and the UN's international fact-finding mission confirmed the abuse and blasted the use of physical, psychological and sexual violence, judicial harassment and other practices to prevent and deter peaceful dissent that continued to take shape in other forms of protest even if it decreased in the streets.[93] **During 2023, the regime continued to arbitrarily arrest and intimidate protesters and critics, their families, people who provided them with help (lawyers and healthcare staff) and others who expressed solidarity with the movement.** Arrests of victims of repression were documented during protests, in schools, at hospital entrances and even during funerals. Many of those prosecuted and convicted were charged with "spreading propaganda against the system", "crimes against security", "disrupting the public order", "spreading lies to disturb the public order" and "insulting the supreme leader". In February, the government announced that it had "pardoned" 22,000 people detained as part of the protests. There are no official figures for the total number of arrests during and after the demonstrations, but human rights groups estimate that they could involve 60,000 people.

In 2023 the Iranian authorities persisted in their repressive policies to quell protests, arbitrarily arresting and intimidating protesters and critics

There are also no official figures for death sentences in these cases, but **information suggests that at least 28 people were sentenced to capital punishment in relation to the protests, of which at least nine (all men) have already been executed** (in December 2022 and January 2024). These death sentences were part of an intensified application of the death penalty, with more than 700 executions between January and November 2023, according to data from the Iran Human Rights Organisation cited by HRW.[94]

There were various warnings of the excessive use of torture against detainees, sometimes resulting in death in 2023. **The use of sexual and gender-based violence was reported, including rape, genital torture, forced nudity and other practices. From late 2022 to November 2023, but especially in the first quarter of 2023, many poisonings of girls in schools were reported**, affecting thousands of students. No fatalities were reported and the official information about the events was confusing, but these episodes were interpreted as a form of intimidation and punishment of the girls for their involvement in the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement. More than 400 university students were also suspended or expelled for their involvement in the protests during 2023, while another 2,800 were submitted to disciplinary committees. Changes of directors were also announced in more than 20,000 schools as part of the "purification" of the educational system. **The authorities also intensified rules and measures to force women to wear the hijab according to the regime's standards, increasing punishment, intimidation and the campaign of harassment and surveillance** against women and girls. The regime promoted regulations to make private actors responsible for monitoring the use of the hijab, expanded the use of cameras in public spaces to pursue "offenders" and even developed an application to facilitate complaints. In this context, on 1 October, a new case very similar to that of Masha Amini occurred when young student Armita Garavand died after an altercation with a group of people in the underground train over use of the hijab. The authorities detained many people during her funeral, including journalists and renowned human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh. Several international awards recognised the struggle of Iranian women against oppression and for the human rights and freedoms of the entire Iranian population. The 2023 Nobel Peace Prize went to imprisoned activist Narges Mohammadi, while the European Parliament awarded the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought to Mahsa Amini and the "Women, Life, Freedom" movement. After 2022, with especially

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91. For more information, see the summary on Iran in the 2023 edition of *Alert!* and Urrutia, Pamela, La revuelta de las mujeres en Irán: ¿un punto de inflexión? Claves desde el análisis de conflictos con perspectiva feminista, *ECP Notes on Conflict and Peace,* no. 27, March 2023.
92. A year after the protests began, the most established reports indicate that 551 died, including 68 minors. The Iranian government also reported the death of 75 security agents.
93. Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, A/HRC/55/67, 2 February 2024.
94. Human Rights Watch, Iran, *World Report 2024.*

intense repression in the Baloch and Kurdish parts of the country,[95] Tehran pursued its repressive policies with lower levels of violence in 2023. Balochistan, which in 2022 was the scene of mass demonstrations and serious acts of violence, continued to be affected by the general climate of repression in the country. Amnesty International reported events that occurred in Zahedan, including cases of arrest, mistreatment, torture and forced disappearance.[96] In December, the armed group Jaish al-Adl claimed responsibility for an attack against a police station in the town of Rask, in which 11 officers died.

Iran (northwest)	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↓
Type:	Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, armed groups PJAK and PDKI, Komala, KDP, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Iraq

Summary:
Despite the heterogeneous and multiethnic nature of Iran, the minorities that inhabit the country, including the Kurds, have been subjected to decades of centralist and homogenisation policies and have reported suffering discrimination from the Iranian authorities. Since 1946, different political and armed groups of Kurdish origin have confronted Tehran in an attempt to gain greater autonomy for the Kurdish population, which lives mostly in the northwestern provinces of the country. Groups like the Kurdish Democratic Party (PDKI) and Komala led this fight for decades. Since 2004, the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK), linked to Türkiye's PKK, has been involved in the conflict with Tehran, and its armed wing, the People's Defence Forces, periodically clashes with Iranian forces, particularly members of the Revolutionary Guard. According to reports, in 2011 the PJAK and the Iranian government agreed to a ceasefire according to which the armed group would stop its attacks and the authorities would stop executing Kurdish prisoners, but hostilities and low-intensity clashes persist.

In 2022, government repression was especially intense in areas inhabited by ethnic and religious minorities, particularly Kurds and Baloch (Sunni), in response to the challenge to the regime throughout the country.[97] The repression continued in 2023, though the actions and incidents were less violent than in the previous year. The situation continued to be shaped by the effects of the crackdown on popular demonstrations following the death of the young Kurdish woman Mahsa Amini in police custody. Human rights organisations continued

to report politically motivated judicial persecution and arrests. According to the Kurdistan Human Rights Network, over 100 people had been arrested by security forces for political reasons in July alone.[98] Also in June, 55 lawyers who had signed a statement offering legal assistance to the family of Mahsa Amini were summoned by the prosecutor's office of Bukan, in the province of Kurdistan, due to their support. **On the eve of the first anniversary of the young Kurdish woman's death in police custody, the Iranian authorities deployed thousands of troops in the areas with the greatest Kurdish presence, where the demonstrations were especially massive in 2023**. Meanwhile, Iraq continued to target Kurdish political and armed groups in 2023. **Tehran and Baghdad reached a border agreement by which the Iraqi government pledged to disarm and relocate Iranian Kurdish organisations operating in the border area with Iran** (mainly from the north of the country) before 19 September.[99] In July, Iranian military representatives warned that they would use force in northern Iraq against these opposition organisations, which they have described as secessionists and terrorists, if the authorities in Baghdad did not act in accordance with the provisions of the deal by the established deadline. In 2022, as part of its response to the protests following the death of Mahsa Amini, Iran attacked the positions of several of these Kurdish groups in northern Iraq. On the agreed date, the Iraqi government announced that it had complied with the terms of the agreement. In December, after a meeting of senior representatives of both countries in Baghdad, Iran thanked Iraq for removing these organisations from the border area, but it added that it was still concerned about evidence of Iranian Kurdish opposition groups in the border area.[100] Balochistan, which in 2022 was the scene of mass demonstrations and serious acts of violence, continued to be affected by the general climate of repression in the country. Amnesty International reported events that occurred in Zahedan, including cases of arrest, mistreatment, torture and forced disappearance.[101] In December, the armed group Jaish al-Adl claimed responsibility for an attack against a police station in the town of Rask, in which 11 officers died.

Iran – USA, Israel[102]	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=
Type:	System, Government International
Main:	Iran, USA, Israel

95. See the summary on Iran (northwest) in this chapter.
96. Amnesty International, Iran: New wave of brutal attacks against Baluchi protesters and worshippers, 26 October 2023.
97. For more information, see La revuelta de las mujeres en Irán: ¿un punto de inflexión? Claves desde el análisis de conflictos con perspectiva feminista, *ECP Notes on Conflict and Peace*, no. 27, March 2023.
98. Human Rights Watch, Iran: World Report 2023, January 2024.
99. Motamedi, Maziar, Iran says deal agreed with Iraq for disarming, relocation of Kurdish rebels, Al-Jazeera, 28 August 2023.
100. Rudaw, Iranian general says concerns remain over Kurdish groups on border, Rudaw, 3 December 2023.
101. Amnesty International, Iran: New wave of brutal attacks against Baluchi protesters and worshippers, 26 October 2023.
102. This international tension affects other countries not mentioned, which are involved in different degrees.

Summary:

Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, which ousted the regime of Shah Mohamed Reza Pahlavi (an ally of Washington) and proclaimed Ayatollah Khomeini as the Supreme Leader of the country, relations between the US, Israel and Iran have been tense. International pressure on Iran intensified after the 9/11 attacks, when the George W. Bush administration declared Iran, Iraq and North Korea as members of the "Axis of Evil" and as an enemy state due to its alleged links with terrorism. In this context, the Iranian nuclear programme has been one of the issues that has generated the greatest concern in the West, which is suspicious of its military purposes. Thus, the Iranian programme has developed alongside the imposition of international sanctions and threats to use force, especially from Israel. Iran's approach to the conflict during the consecutive terms of office of the ultra-conservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013) did not help to de-escalate the tension. The rise to power of the moderate cleric Hassan Rouhani raised expectations about a thaw in Iran's relations with the outside world, especially after the start of negotiations on the Iranian nuclear programme in late 2013 and the signing of a related agreement in mid-2015. In recent years, the US withdrawal from the agreement in 2018 and the intensification of its sanctions policy, Iran's gradual distancing from the promises it made in the agreement and a turbulent regional context have aggravated tension and made it difficult to find a solution to the dispute.

In keeping with the trend of the previous year, **the tension around the Iranian nuclear programme remained high throughout 2023, in a scenario characterised by a standstill in the diplomatic negotiations** to restore compliance with the 2015 agreement (JCPOA) **and by the security incidents that mainly involved Iranian, US and Israeli forces that intensified in the last quarter**. In 2023, there were no new direct rounds in the Vienna process, though contacts through diplomatic channels continued.[103] In the first few months of the year, Iran faced international accusations for its nuclear activities and growing criticism for its harsh crackdown on internal opposition in the country, which intensified after the death of a young Kurdish woman, Mahsa Amini, in police custody in September 2022.[104] In this context, new sanctions were imposed on Tehran in retaliation for human rights abuses and for providing miliary materiel to Russia, especially drones that were being used in Ukraine, in violation of the provisions of UNSC Resolution 2231, which formalised the UN's endorsement of the JCPOA. The IAEA continued to complain that the boundaries established in the nuclear agreement were being broken and although some progress was identified in the middle of the year and some activities were clarified, by the end of 2023, expectations for the nuclear dialogue worsened again, partly as an indirect consequence of the crisis in Gaza, but also due to other variables, such as Tehran's

withdrawal of its authorisation for several inspectors to carry out verification tasks. Thus, the EU and the United Kingdom decided to maintain their restrictions and sanctions on Iran's ballistic missile programme, which expired in October 2023, on the grounds that Tehran had not complied since 2019. The US also announced new sanctions on entities and people linked to the Iranian programme and others for the alleged transfer of weapons to Hamas.

Security incidents between different actors directly or indirectly involved in the tension continued to be reported throughout the year, such as a drone attack on the Isfahan power plant attributed to Israel (January), attacks against US forces allegedly by Tehran-backed forces in Iraq and Syria and US strikes against these groups in both countries. The friction also led to maritime tension mainly in the Gulf of Oman and the Strait of Hormuz that involved some oil tankers. The interception of vessels from Iran heading to Yemen, allegedly carrying weapons for the Houthis, was also reported. In the middle of the year, the United States announced that it was strengthening its naval capabilities, including troops, aircraft and amphibious units. There were relatively fewer incidents after the regional detente linked to the rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia (May), after years of broken diplomatic relations, and alongside indirect talks between Tehran and Washington mediated by Oman that led to a temporary exemption from the sanctions (July) and an agreement for Tehran's release of five Americans imprisoned in Iran in exchange for restoring its access to $6 billion that was held in bank accounts in South Korea (September). **Since October 2023, incidents have increased as a result of the crisis in Gaza, given Tehran's support for Hamas and Washington's support for Israel.** Until the end of the year, attacks multiplied, carried out by groups of the self-proclaimed "Axis of Resistance" (made up of Hezbollah, pro-Iranian militias in Iraq and Syria, the Houthis in Yemen and others) against US forces in Iraq and Syria, by the US against these organisations and by Israel against Hezbollah and Iran's positions and interests.[105] In December, Iran warned of consequences for the death of a senior Republican Guard (IRGC) official in Syria in an air strike it blamed on Israel. The US and Israel also singled out Tehran for action taken by the Houthis in the last quarter, including attacks from Yemen to Israel and against ships in the Red Sea.[106] In this highly volatile regional context, at the end of the year the UN Secretary-General defended the JCPOA as the best option available to address the Iranian nuclear issue, guarantee its peaceful nature and work for non-proliferation and security in the region.

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103. For more information, see chapter 6 (Peace negotiations in the Middle East) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.
104. See the summary on Iran in this chapter.
105. For more information, see the summaries on Iraq, Israel-Palestine and Syria in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).
106. For more information, see the summary on Yemen in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts) and "Yemen: escalada de tensión en el Mar Rojo" in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Escenarios de riesgo y oportunidades de paz*, January 2024.

Map 3.1. **Gender, peace and security**
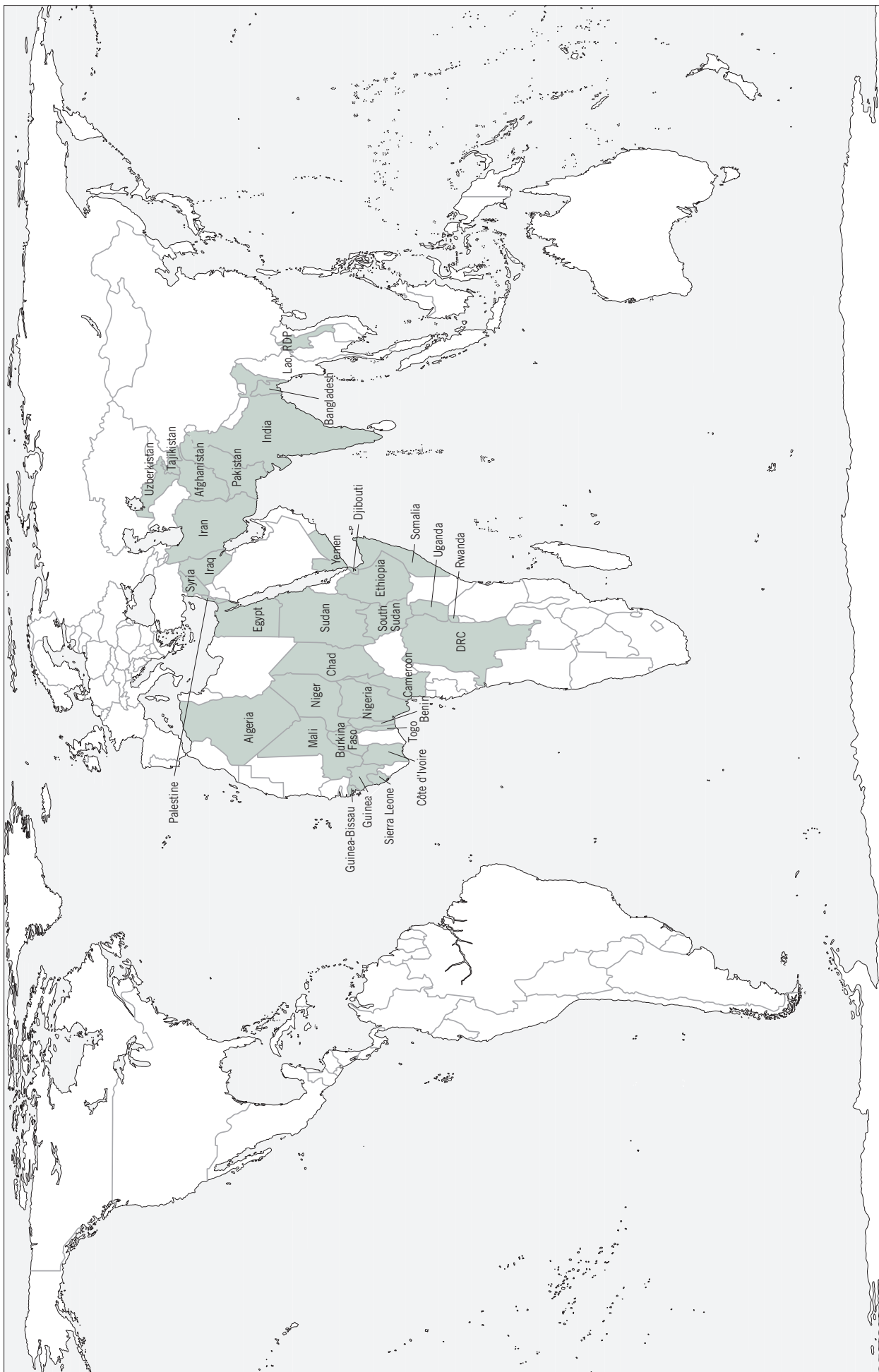
Countries affected by armed conflict and/or socio-political crises with a medium-low or low level of gender 2023

3. Gender, peace and security

- 23 of the 36 armed conflicts in the world in 2023 took place in countries with low levels of gender equality.

- 88% of the high-intensity conflicts occurred in countries with low-or medium-low levels of gender equality.

- The United Nations warned of the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, Mali, Myanmar and Sudan regarding the use of sexual violence in armed conflicts.

- The Central African Republic (CAR) was affected by an escalation of gender-based violence as a result of the conflict and the climate crisis, in what was described as a "protection and gender crisis".

- In Colombia, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace opened a macro case on all sexual and gender-based violence committed during the armed conflict between the FARC and the Colombian government.

- The report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Iran identified a pattern of sexual violence carried out by state agents in detention centres.

- The indiscriminate and deliberate use of violence against the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza caused over 30,000 deaths by the end of 2023, 70% of them women and children.

- The UN Secretary-General noted a new setback in women's participation in peace processes.

The Gender, Peace and Security chapter analyses the gender impacts of armed conflicts and socio–political crises, as well as the inclusion of the gender perspective into various international and local peacebuilding initiatives by international organisations, especially the United Nations, national governments, as well as different organisations and movements from local and international civil society.[1] In addition, a follow–up is made of the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda. The gender perspective provides visibility to the distinct impacts of armed conflict on the population as a consequence of gender inequalities and intersections with other lines of inequality, as well as the contributions that women and the LGTBIQ+ population are making to peacebuilding. The chapter is structured into three main sections: the first provides an assessment of the global situation with regard to gender inequalities by analysing the Gender Development Index; the second analyses the gender dimension in armed conflicts and socio–political crises; and the final section is devoted to peacebuilding from a gender perspective. At the beginning of the chapter, a map is attached that shows those countries with serious gender inequalities according to the Gender Development Index. The chapter conducts a specific follow–up of the implementation of the agenda on women, peace and security, established after the adoption by the UN Security Council in 2000 of resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

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1. Gender is the analytical category that highlights that inequalities between men and women are a social construct and not a result of nature, underlining their social and cultural construction in order to distinguish them from biological differences of the sexes. Gender aims to give visibility to the social construction of sexual difference and the sexual division of labour and power. The gender perspective seeks to show that the differences between men and women are a social construct, which is a product of unequal power relations that have historically been established in the patriarchal system. Gender as a category of analysis aims to demonstrate the historical and context–based nature of sexual differences. This approach must be accompanied by an intersectional analysis that relates gender to other factors that structure power in a society, such as social class, race, ethnicity, age, or sexuality, among other aspects that generate inequalities, discrimination and privileges.

Table 3.1. **Countries affected by armed conflict with a medium-low or low level of gender equality²**

Low level of equality		
Afghanistan **Burkina Faso** Western Sahel Region **Chad** Lake Chad Region **DRC (3)** DRC (east) DRC (east-ADF) DRC (west) **Egypt** Egypt (Sinai) **Iraq**	**India (2)** India (Jammu and Kashmir) India (CPI-M) **Mali (2)** Mali Western Sahel Region **Niger (2)** Lake Chad Region Western Sahel Region **Nigeria** Lake Chad Region	**Pakistan (2)** Pakistan Pakistan (Balochistan) **Palestine** Israel-Palestine **Somalia (2)** Somalia Somalia (Somaliland-SCC Khatumo) **Sudan** **Syria** **Yemen**
Medium-low level of equality		
Cameroon (2) Cameroon (Ambazonia/North West and South West) Lake Chad Region	**Ethiopia (3)** Ethiopia (Amhara) Ethiopia (Oromia) Ethiopia (Tigray)	

3.1. Gender inequalities

To evaluate the gender inequality situation in countries affected by armed conflicts and/or socio-political crises, the data provided by the UNDP's Gender Development Index (GDI) has been used. This index measures disparities in relation to the Human Development Index (HDI)[3] between genders. The value of the Gender Development Index is calculated based on the ratio of HDI values for women and men.[4] The GDI divides countries into five groups by absolute deviation from gender parity in HDI values.

According to the GDI, levels of equality between men and women were medium-low or low in 46 countries, mostly located in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. The analysis achieved by cross-referencing the data of this index with those of the countries involved in an armed conflict reveal that **23 of the 36 armed conflicts active**

23 of the 36 armed conflicts active throughout 2023 took place in countries with low or medium-low levels of gender equality

throughout 2023 took place in countries with low levels of gender equality** (Mali, the Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram), the Western Sahel Region,[5] the DRC (east), the DRC (east-ADF), the DRC (west), Somalia, Somalia (Somaliland-SCC Khatumo), Sudan, Afghanistan, India (Jammu and Kashmir), India (CPI-M), Pakistan, Pakistan (Balochistan), Egypt (Sinai), Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Syria and Yemen) **and medium-low gender equality** (Cameroon (Ambazonia/North West and South West), Ethiopia (Amhara), Ethiopia (Oromia) and Ethiopia (Tigray). **There are no data** on the CAR and South Sudan, both countries **in which an armed conflict is taking place.** Fifteen of the 17 armed conflicts with **high-intensity** violence in 2023 (88%) took place in countries with low or medium-low levels of gender equality and there were no GDI data for South Sudan. In eight other countries with one or more armed conflicts, levels of discrimination were lower, in some cases with high levels of equality (Libya, Colombia, Thailand, Russia, Ukraine

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2. Table compiled from the data gathered by the School for a Culture of Peace on armed conflicts and from the data on countries with low and medium-low levels of gender equality according to the UNDP's Gender Development Index, as indicated in the 2023/2024 Human Development Report. The country is highlighted in bold and the armed conflict(s) active in the country in 2023 are listed below the country. In countries where there is more than one armed conflict, the number of conflicts is indicated in brackets.

3. The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in three key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life (longevity), being knowledgeable (education) and having a decent standard of living (income per capita). For more information, see the UNDP's *2021/2022 Human Development Report. Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives: Shaping our Future in a Transforming World*, UNDP, 2022.

4. To establish the different levels of inequality in countries, the classification proposed by UNDP has been used, in which countries are divided into five groups by absolute deviation from gender parity in HDI values. Group 1: countries with a high level of equality in terms of achievements in HDI between women and men (absolute deviation below 2.5%); Group 2: countries with a medium-high level of equality in terms of achievements in HDI between women and men (absolute deviation between 2.5% and 5%); Group 3: countries with a medium level of equality in terms of achievements in HDI between women and men (absolute deviation between 5% and 7.5%); Group 4: countries with a medium-low level of equality in terms of achievements in HDI between women and men (absolute deviation between 7.5% and 10%); and Group 5: countries with a low level of equality in terms of achievements in HDI between women and men (absolute deviation from gender parity exceeding 10%).

5. The conflict in the Western Sahel region is counted as one of the 20 armed conflicts in countries with low levels of gender equality. This conflict involves three countries with a low level of equality (Mali, Ivory Coast and Niger) and one country with a medium-low level (Burkina Faso).

Table 3.2. Countries affected by socio-political crises with a medium-low or low level of gender equality[6]

Low level of equality		
Afghanistan Afghanistan - Pakistan	**Guinea Bissau**	**Nigeria (3)** Nigeria Nigeria (Biafra) Nigeria (Niger Delta)
Algeria	**India (4)** India (Manipur) India (Nagaland) India – China India – Pakistan	**Pakistan (3)** Pakistan Afghanistan - Pakistan India – Pakistan
Benin		
Burkina Faso		
Chad	**Iran (4)** Iran Iran (North West) Iran (Sistan and Balochistan) Iran – USA, Israel	**Palestine**
Côte D'Ivoire		**Rwanda (3)** Rwanda Rwanda – Burundi RDC – Rwanda
Djibouti		
DRC (2) DRC DRC – Rwanda	**Iraq** Iraq (Kurdistan)	**Sierra Leone**
	Mali	
Egypt (2) Egypt Ethiopia – Egypt – Sudan	**Morocco** Morocco – Western Sahara	**Sudan – South Sudan** **Togo**
	Niger	
Guinea		**Uganda**

Medium-low level of equality		
Bangladesh	**Lao, PDR**	**Uzbekistan (2)** Uzbekistan Uzbekistan (Karakalpakstan)
Ethiopia (5) Ethiopia Ethiopia – Egypt –Sudan Ethiopia – Somalia Ethiopia – Sudan Eritrea – Ethiopia	**Tajikistan (3)** Tajikistan Tajikistan (Gorno-Badakhshan) Kyrgyzstan – Tajikistan	

and Israel) or medium levels of equality (Burundi, Mozambique, the Philippines, Myanmar and Türkiye), according to the GDI. **Forty-six of the 108 socio-political crises active during 2023 took place in countries with low or medium-low levels of gender equality.**

3.2. The impact of violence and conflicts from a gender perspective

This section addresses the gender dimension in the conflict cycle, especially in reference to violence against women. The gender perspective is a useful tool for the analysis of armed conflicts and socio–political crises and makes it possible to give visibility to aspects generally ignored in this analysis both in terms of causes and consequences.

3.2.1. Sexual violence in armed conflicts and socio-political crises

As in previous years, during 2023 sexual violence was present in a large number of active armed conflicts.[7] Its use, which in some cases was part of the deliberate war strategies of the armed actors, was documented in different reports, as well as by local and international media. In July, the UN Security Council held its yearly **open debate on sexual violence in armed conflict** and the UN Secretary-General presented his annual report on the issue. The year 2023 marked the 15th anniversary of UNSC Resolution 1820, which marked the beginning of a series of resolutions as part of the women, peace and security agenda especially focused on sexual violence in armed conflicts. In his 2023 report, which covered the period between January and December 2022, the UN Secretary-General warned

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6. Table compiled from the data gathered by the School for a Culture of Peace on socio-political crises and from the data on countries with low and medium-low levels of gender equality according to the UNDP's Gender Development Index, as indicated in the 2023/2024 Human Development Report. The country is highlighted in bold and the socio-political crisis or crises active in the country in 2023 are listed below the country. In countries where there is more than one socio-political crisis, the number of crises is indicated in brackets.

7. The UN considers sexual violence related to conflicts to be "incidents or patterns of sexual violence [...], that is, rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancies, forced sterilisation or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, boys or girls. These incidents or patterns of behavior occur in situations of conflict or post–conflict or in other situations of concern (for example, during a political confrontation). In addition, they have a direct or indirect relationship with the conflict or political confrontation, that is, a temporal, geographical or causal relationship. Apart from the international nature of the alleged crimes, which depending on the circumstances constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity, acts of genocide or other gross violations of human rights, the relationship with the conflict may be evidenced by taking into account the profile and motivations of the perpetrator, the profile of the victim, the climate of impunity or the breakdown of law and order by which the State in question may be affected, the cross–border dimensions or the fact that they violate the provisions of a ceasefire agreement". UN Action Against Sexual Violence In Conflict, *Analytical and conceptual framework of sexual violence in conflicts*, November 2012.

Table 3.3. **Armed actors and sexual violence in conflicts**[8]

The UN Secretary-General's report on sexual violence in conflicts, published in June 2023, included a list of armed actors who are suspected of having committed systematic acts of rape and other forms of sexual violence or of being responsible for them in situations of armed conflict, which are subject to examination by the Security Council.[9]

	STATE ACTORS	NON-STATE ACTORS
CAR	National armed forces	Coalition des patriotes pour le changement – former President François Bozizé: Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation – General Bobbo; Anti-balaka Mokom-Maxime Mokom; Anti-balaka Ngaïssona-Dieudonné Ndomate; Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique – Noureddine Adam and Zone Commander Mahamat Salleh; Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique – Mahamat Al-Khatim; Unité pour la paix en Centrafrique-Ali Darrassa; Lord's Resistance Army; Ex-Séléka factions; Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain – Abdoulaye Miskine; Révolution et justice
DRC	Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Congolese National Police	Alliance des patriotes pour un Congo libre et souverain-Janvier; Allied Democratic Forces; Coopérative pour le développement du Congo; Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda; Force de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri; Forces patriotiques populaires-armée du peuple; Lord's Resistance Army; Nduma défense du Congo; Nduma défense du Congo-Rénové faction led by "General" Guidon Shimiray Mwissa and faction led by Commander Gilbert Bwira Shuo and Deputy Commander Fidel Malik Mapenzi; Mai-Mai Kifuafua; Mai-Mai Raia Mutomboki; Mai-Mai Apa Na Pale; Mai-Mai Malaika; Mai-Mai Perci Moto; Mai-Mai Yakutumba; Mouvement du 23 mars (M23); Nyatura; Twa militias; Union des patriotes pour la défense des citoyens
Haiti		G9 Family and Allies– Jimmy Cherizier (alias "Barbeque")
Iraq		Da'esh
Mali		Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad, part of Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad; Ansar Eddine; Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, part of Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin; Groupe d'autodéfense des Touaregs Imghad et leurs alliés, part of Plateforme des mouvements du 14 juin 2014 d'Alger
Myanmar	Myanmar armed forces (Tatmadaw), including integrated Border Guard	
Nigeria		Boko Haram-affiliated and splinter groups, including Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad and Islamic State West Africa Province
Somalia	Somali National Army; Somali Police Force (and allied militia); Puntland forces	Al-Shabaab
South Sudan	South Sudan People's Defence Forces, including Taban Deng-allied South Sudan People's Defence Forces; South Sudan National Police Service	Lord's Resistance Army; Justice and Equality Movement; Sudan People's Liberation/Army in Opposition – pro-Machar
Sudan	Sudanese Armed Forces; Rapid Support Forces	Justice and Equality Movement; Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid
Syria	Government forces, including the National Defence Forces, intelligence services and pro-government militias	Da'esh; Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham; Army of Islam; Ahrar al-Sham

of some worrying trends regarding the use of sexual violence in armed conflicts and said that the situation was deteriorating in Afghanistan, Mali, Myanmar and Sudan, where violent changes in government and coups d'état have jeopardised previous progress made in recognising women's rights and where women have been seriously affected by sexual violence. The report points to worsening patterns in the use of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Haiti and South Sudan. Sexual violence was used as part of political and repressive violence in different

armed conflicts and socio-political crises and was one of the driving factors in population displacement, which also affected previously displaced populations, given the vulnerability faced by women who must forcibly leave their places of origin, whether as internally displaced persons or refugees.

The annual report submitted in 2023 by the UN Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence identified 49 armed groups which were credibly suspected of having committed or having been responsible for rapes

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8. This table uses the names of the armed actors as they appear in the Secretary-General's report, so they do not necessarily coincide with the ones used in chapters 1 and 2 of this yearbook.
9. UN Security Council, *Conflict-Related Sexual Violence. Report of the United Nations Secretary-General*, S/2023/413, 22 June 2023.

or other forms of sexual violence in armed conflict settings on the agenda of the UN Security Council.[10] Most of the actors identified by the United Nations in its annex were non-state armed actors, although some state armed actors were also identified, across a total of 11 settings (CAR, DRC, Haiti, Iraq, Mali, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria and Nigeria).

According to the classification system used by Escola de Cultura de Pau, 10 of the 11 contexts analysed in the UN Secretary-General's report were countries with high-intensity armed conflicts during 2022 (Iraq, Mali, Myanmar, Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram), the DRC (east), the DRC (east – ADF), Syria, Somalia, Sudan (Darfur) and South Sudan), generally exceeding one thousand fatalities per year and having serious impacts on people and the territory, including sexual violence related to the armed conflict. These 10 conflicts remained active in 2023 at high levels of intensity. In six of them, there was also an escalation of violence during 2023 compared to the previous year (Mali, Myanmar, the DRC (east), Syria, Somalia and Sudan). Most of the armed actors blamed for sexual violence in armed conflicts by the UN Secretary-General were non-state actors, some of which had been included on the United Nations' list of terrorist organisations.

In the Ethiopian region of **Tigray**, even though the 2022 peace agreement included issues related to gender-based violence committed over the course of the conflict and urged the parties to condemn any acts of sexual or gender-based violence, Eritrean forces and the Fano militias continued to carry out acts of sexual violence and atrocities, as detailed by the African Union's International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, whose mandate was suspended by the Human Rights Council in late 2023.

The **Central African Republic (CAR)** was affected by an escalation of gender-based violence in 2023 as a result of the conflict and the climate crisis. According to the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, the deputy special representative of the UN Secretary-General in the country and humanitarian coordinator of MINUSCA, Mohamed Ag Ayoya, said that the crisis gripping the country should be classified not only as a humanitarian crisis, but as a **"protection and gender crisis"**.[11] Serious human rights violations were reported, including many different forms of gender-based violence, climate change, forced displacement and food insecurity for over half the population. The NGO Working Group said that gender-based violence, including sexual violence, has increased, exacerbated by conflict and the climate crisis, perpetrated not only by armed actors but also by civilians on a massive scale.

10 of the 11 contexts of conflict-related sexual violence indicated by the UN Secretary-General were countries with high-intensity armed conflicts

Furthermore, large-scale displacement continued in both the CAR and neighbouring countries. For example, since June 2023, over 37,000 people, mainly women and children, arrived in the prefectures of Ouham and Ouham-Pendé fleeing violence in southeastern Chad, putting them at greater risk of exploitation and violence. Finally, decades of conflict in the CAR have destroyed its ability to provide healthcare, with particularly dire results for sexual and reproductive health.

In the **DRC**, as part of the armed conflict in the eastern part of the country, women and girls have been seriously affected by high levels of sexual and gender-based violence, which continue to rise. In this regard, local and international civil society representatives addressed the UN Security Council in December 2023, arguing that the political negotiating efforts under way (the Luanda and Nairobi processes) need to be more inclusive and led by local peacebuilders and civil society, especially women and youth. Despite the United Nations' zero tolerance policy, during the year MONUSCO reported new complaints of sexual exploitation and abuse in events that took place between 2011 and 2023 that involved members of the military and civilian components of the mission.

The situation in **Somalia** continued to be very serious and there were setbacks in terms of gender-based violence and the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda, as asserted by the executive director of UN Women, Sima Bahous, at the UN Security Council meeting held in February, where she depicted a devastating situation. The rise in violence and the current drought, which forcibly displaced the population and resulted in food insecurity, exposed the country to a greater risk of famine. The last famine in Somalia, declared in 2011, killed one quarter of a million people and exacerbated gender-based violence. As Sima Bahous[12] noted, rates of sexual violence have risen alarmingly since 2020. They doubled over 2019 and continued to climb as the worst drought in many decades had a devastating impact on all Somalis, with a disproportionate impact on women and girls. Impunity remained widespread and armed groups, especially al-Shabaab, continued to kidnap women and girls, force families to give them their daughters to marry and occupy hospitals and maternity wards. They also silenced and threatened anyone speaking out about the situation, such as by killing Amina Mohamed Abdi, a young MP, and Hibaq Abukar, the prime minister's advisor on women's affairs, as well as other women activists and women working in local and national politics and civil society.

Various actors continued to document and report sexual violence in **Russia's invasion and war against Ukraine**.

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10. UN Security Council, *Conflict-Related Sexual Violence. Report of the United Nations Secretary-General*, S/2023/413, 22 June 2023.
11. NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, *Monthly Action Points. Women, Peace and Security,* November 2023.
12. Bahous, Sima, "Speech: seize the opportunity for decisive action in Somalia", *UN Women*, 22 February 2023.

Established by the Human Rights Council via Resolution 49/1 of March 2022, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, consisting of three experts in coordination with OHCHR, noted in its October 2023 report that its recent investigations were focused on the provinces of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia. In previous reports, it had documented cases in nine provinces of Ukraine and on Russian territory.[13] In this phase, it documented rape and other forms of sexual violence by Russian forces in a district of Kherson province, committed between March and July 2022, mainly during raids by Russian forces on victims' homes.[14] In some cases, sexual violence and threats of sexual violence were documented in Russian-controlled detention facilities. In the cases documented by the international commission, the victims were women between the ages of 19 and 83 and one 16-year-old girl. The commission documented that the sexual violence was committed with the use of force and psychological coercion, that the perpetrators were mostly Russian soldiers and in some cases members of the Donetsk and Luhansk rebel forces, and that additional violence was committed against the victims, including beating, strangulation, choking and shooting near the head. The United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) continued to document sexual violence related to the armed conflict in Ukraine. Between 24 February and 30 November, the mission documented 169 cases of sexual violence perpetrated by members of the military forces and Russian agents. Sixty per cent were cases of sexual violence against men, 37% against women, 2% against girls and 1% against boys (101, 63, four and one cases, respectively).[15] Most of the cases (80%) occurred in detention centres against civilians (56, including 37 men, 18 women and one child) and prisoners of war (63 men and 16 women). Between 1 December 2023 and 29 February 2024, the mission documented 66 cases of arbitrary detention of civilians (55 men, 10 women and one child) by Russian forces, some of which could be equivalent to forced disappearance, and reported that most of the victims reported having been subjected to torture, mistreatment or sexual violence.[16] The mission noted that they were violations of Russia's obligations as an occupying power, already identified in previous periods as a documented pattern. Furthermore, 65% of the members a group of Ukrainian prisoners of war (39 of 60) interviewed by

The report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Iran identified a pattern of sexual violence perpetrated by state agents in detention centres

the HRMMU after their release reported having been subjected to sexual violence during their internment, including through attempts or threats of rape and castration, beatings and electric shocks to the genitals and forced stripping. Two of 44 Russian prisoners of war (4.5%) interviewed by the HRMMUU reported threats of sexual violence by Ukrainian forces. More of them reported torture or ill-treatment in places of transit: among other data, 13 of them reported beatings, electroshocks or mock executions.

The use of sexual violence by the authorities of **Kazakhstan** against men and women detained as part of the crackdown on the protests of January 2022 was documented and reported in 2023.[17] According to Human Rights Watch, human rights groups documented the use of sexual violence, including rape and the threat of rape, alongside other types of torture and mistreatment such as caning, burning and electroshocks. At least 23 police officers were convicted of torture, but dozens of cases were closed with considerations of unfounded accusations, as HRW warned in its annual report on the human rights situation.[18]

In **Iran**, after a turbulent 2022 due to the protests led by the "Women, Life, Freedom" movement and the regime's harsh crackdown, the year 2023 was characterised by fewer demonstrations and new restrictive measures that especially affected women and girls. During the year, investigations were conducted into the circumstances of the death of Mahsa Amini, the young Kurdish woman whose death triggered popular demonstrations in September 2022, and also into the use of violence in the repression and persecution of dissidents, including sexual violence. The report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran identified a pattern of sexual violence perpetrated by state agents in detention centres.[19] This included rape, torture with electricity to the genitals, forced stripping, fondling and other forms of sexual violence. The mission documented the use of sexual and gender-based violence against women, men and minors who had been detained, including LGBTIQ+ people arrested for their connection to the protests. The report indicates that Iranian security forces also appealed to social and cultural stigmas linked to sexual and gender issues to frighten, humiliate and punish

13. See chapter 3 (Gender, Peace and security) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Alert 2023! Report on conflicts, humans rights and peacebuilding*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2023.
14. Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine*, Human Rights Council, A/78/540, 19 October 2023.
15. OHCHR, *Report on the human rights situation, 1 August 2023 to 30 November 2023*, OHCHR, 12 December 2023.
16. OHCHR, *Report on the human rights situation, 1 December 2023 to 29 February 2024*, OHCHR, 26 March 2024.
17. See the summary on Kazakhstan in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises) de Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Alert 2023! Report on conflicts, humans rights and peacebuilding*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2023.
18. Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2024*, HRW, 2024.
19. Human Rights Council, *Report of the independent International fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran*, HRC, A/hrc/55/67, 2 February 2024.

people involved in protests against the regime. Sexual and gender-based violence against female protesters was often accompanied by insults questioning their honour and morality and was sometimes justified by the authorities as a result of "the freedom they want".

3.2.2. Response to sexual violence in armed conflicts

Throughout the year there were different initiatives to respond to sexual violence in the context of armed conflicts, as well as to fight against impunity in different judicial bodies. Some of these are described below.

In relation to the **United Nations' response to sexual exploitation and abuse by personnel serving under its mandate**, the strategy promoted by UN Secretary-General António Guterres since 2017 continued to focus on four areas of action: prioritising the rights and dignity of victims; ending impunity by strengthening reporting; collaborating with states, civil society and associated actors; and improving communications. In his report for 2023, the UN Secretary-General[20] indicated that 100 complaints were filed with peacekeeping missions and special political missions during the year. This was an increase, since 79 complaints were filed in 2022. The complaints identified 143 victims: 115 adults and 28 minors. As in 2022, two peacekeeping missions received 90% of the complaints, the same as the previous year: MONUSCO in the DRC with 66 complaints and MINUSCA in the CAR, with 24 complaints. Additional allegations were related to the missions in South Sudan, Lebanon, Haiti (the former United Nations Stabilisation Mission), the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan, which is no longer active. The UN Secretary-General described the challenges hindering the end of sexual exploitation and abuse at the United Nations, especially in humanitarian and peacekeeping operations, such as the lack of financing, inconsistencies between operations and programmes, the absence of safe and confidential reporting channels, the need to improve the technical capacity of staff, particularly designated focal points to ensure protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, and difficulties related to reporting procedures. There were also delays in investigations, making it difficult to provide victims' with accountability and adequate support.

MONUSCO and MINUSCA peacekeeping missions accounted again for 90% of the allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse

The Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court presented a new "Policy on gender-based crimes: crimes involving sexual, reproductive and other gender-based violence".[21] The purpose of this document is to improve the work of the prosecutor in prosecuting gender-based crimes, clarifying and guiding application of the Rome Statute and contributing to the development of international jurisprudence in that area. The document notes that all crimes committed covered by the Statute (genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and aggression) may involve gender-based factors when they are committed and cause gender-specific harm as a result. The term "gender-based crimes" replaces the term "sexual and gender-based crimes" used in 2014. Gender-based crimes include crimes of sexual violence, reproductive violence and other types of gender-based violence and how they interrelate.

In Colombia, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP)[22] opened a macro case called "Gender-based violence, sexual violence, reproductive violence and other crimes of prejudice based on sexual orientation, expression and/or diverse gender identity as part of the Colombian armed conflict", aimed at addressing all sexual and gender-based violence committed during the armed conflict by the different parties involved. In this way, three subcases were established to address the violence committed by members of the armed group FARC-EP against civilians, by members of the security forces against civilians and by these two actors within each of these organisations. The investigation is not only focused on the armed actors' crimes and behaviours, but also on their motives and rationales. The JEP indicated that 35,178 victims of gender-based, sexual and reproductive violence had been reported between 1957 and 2016, of which practically 90% were women. The JEP also found that a significant portion of the crimes were committed against the LGBTIQ+ population. The JEP identifies two years in which there was a peak in sexual violence: in 2002 and 2014. The macro case was opened because the peace agreement signed between the Colombian government and the now-defunct FARC-EP included sexual violence as a crime that could not be pardoned. Its inclusion was the result of a major civil society advocacy campaign, which after the agreement was signed also called for opening a case as part of the JEP. Civil society organisations involved in the advocacy campaigns hailed the opening of the macro case, describing it as a victory for the victims of sexual violence in the conflict.

20. UN Secretary-General, *Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. Report of the Secretary-General.* A/78/774, 2024.
21. Office of the Prosecutor, *Policy On Gender-Based Crimes, Crimes involving sexual, reproductive and other gender-based violence.* International Criminal Court, 2023.
22. The Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) is the justice component of the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition established in the peace agreement between the national government of Colombia and the FARC-EP, signed in 2016.

3.2.3. Other gender-based violence in socio-political crises or armed conflict

In addition to sexual violence, armed conflicts and socio-political crisis had other serious gender impacts. Impunity for human rights violations continued to be a recurrent element.

The gender impacts on the **Gaza Strip** were especially noticeable and serious in 2023. Hamas' unprecedented attack on 7 October triggered the start of an Israeli military offensive against the entire Gaza Strip, characterised by enormous destructive power and the indiscriminate and deliberate use of violence against the Palestinian civilian population. By the end of 2023, in less than three months, the Israeli campaign, which was described as collective punishment and increasingly as genocide against the Palestinian people, had caused the death of more than 25,000 Palestinians, while another estimated 8,000 remained buried under the rubble. Seventy per cent of this total were women and minors. As indicated by UN Women, this percentage is especially significant because it reverses the trend observed in the last 15 years, in which most (67%) civilian victims were men.[23] In her report "Anatomy of a Genocide", the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Francesca Albanese, argued that it could not be assumed that all adult men are Hamas combatants.[24] She also pointed out that in early December, Israel announced that it had killed "7,000 terrorists" in a stage of the military campaign and hostilities in which only 5,000 adult men had been identified among the dead. As Albanese asserted, this means that the Israeli government assumed that all the Palestinian men killed in the offensive were "terrorists", revealing an intention to attack indiscriminately, assigning them the status of active combatants by default.

The consequences are not only limited to lethality. By the end of 2023, the Israeli air and ground campaign had displaced more than 75% of the population, forced to flee first south and then west while being attacked on routes previously identified as safe by Israel. The destruction of homes, hospitals and all types of civil infrastructure and the intensification of the blockade contributed to a humanitarian crisis of extraordinary proportions that led more than half the Gazan population to famine. In this context, characterised by very serious shortages of water, food, medicine and fuel, overcrowding and constant insecurity due to persistent attacks, Palestinian women tried to sustain life. At the same time, women faced many different effects, such as violations of their right to health care: diseases resulting from overcrowding

Seventy per cent of the people who died due to the Israel military campaign in Gaza were women and children

and the lack of hygiene, the lack of access to basic menstrual hygiene products, which motivated many of them to take pills to block menstruation, and the lack of medical treatment. Over 50,000 pregnant women in Gaza have been especially affected by the crisis due to their inability to access necessary health care in the pre- and post-partum phase. Thus, thousands of women have been forced to give birth in extreme conditions, some of them subjected to caesarean sections without anaesthesia, while the percentage of premature births increased between 25% and 30%. Due to a lack of basic medical supplies, many young women have had otherwise unnecessary hysterectomies to save their lives, but which leave them unable to procreate in the future. Thousands of Palestinian mothers in Gaza suffered daily from the death or mutilation of their sons and daughters (by the end of the year, more than one thousand had lost one or both legs), the countless forms of deprivation and the inability to offer them security, protection, food or access to their most basic rights, such as education. In this context, many also warned of the impacts on mental health and the collective trauma that will affect generations of Palestinians as a consequence of the genocide.

The issue of sexual violence has also been a factor. In early 2024, the UN Special Representative for Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict and executive director of UN Women, Sima Bahous, travelled to Israel to investigate allegations of sexual violence committed by members of Hamas and other Palestinian groups during the 7 October offensive. The United Nations has stressed that the mission, which was limited in duration, was not investigative and therefore could not verify the allegations, determine the prevalence of the incidents or attribute them to any specific group, stressing that to do so would require an independent investigation with the necessary powers.[25] Nevertheless, the Special Representative declared that she had received indications of sexual violence in at least three locations (the Nova festival, a road and a kibbutz) and against people held as hostages. Bahous also collected information and evidence on the use of sexual violence against Palestinian women and men detained by Israeli security forces in Gaza and the West Bank following the events of 7 October, Including blows to the genitals, threats of rape and forced stripping.

Discriminatory practices, policies and laws persisted against women in **Afghanistan**, who were exposed to very high levels of violence with no protection from the authorities, further contributing to their exclusion and discrimination against them. For example, during 2023, many divorces approved by the previous government were annulled, exposing many women to

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23. UN Women, *Statement on Gaza by UN Women Executive Director Sima Bahous*, 19 January 2024.
24. Albanese, Francesca, *Anatomy of a Genocide*, *HRC*, A/HRC/55/73, 25 March 2024.
25. UNSC, *Report of the secretary general on conflict-related sexual violence*, S/2024/292, 4 April 2024.

gender-based violence as they were forced to return. In fact, the situation of Afghan women was the subject of attention at the UN Security Council, which through the adoption of UNSC Resolution 2679 commissioned an independent assessment of the situation in Afghanistan and recommendations for addressing relations with the country.[26] The assessment indicated that the situation of women and girls there was a serious issue raised by all actors involved in the investigations for preparing the report, confirming how the policies promoted by the Taliban regime involve serious human rights violations and break several different international treaties, including CEDAW. The repeal of discriminatory legislation against women and the protection of the rights of women and girls were noted as steps that the Taliban administration should take for eventual diplomatic normalisation in the future.

In addition to sexual violence, the armed conflict in **Somalia** continued to have other serious impacts on gender. At the UN Security Council meeting in February 2023, the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict and executive director of UN Women, Sima Bahous, revealed a devastating situation. Bahous noted that in Somalia, the 30% quota for women in elections and government was not met, women's representation had decreased, sexual violence had increased and Parliament had not yet ratified the sexual crimes bill unanimously adopted by the Council of Ministers five years before. Instead, opponents of the law pushed for alternative legislation that would legalise child marriage, bypass the age of consent, reduce the types of admissible evidence and eliminate survivors' rights. Bahous said that the Somali women invited to report to the Council of Ministers had warned of this situation, but no appropriate action had been taken.

In **Sudan**, the Ministry of Social Development's Unit for Combating Violence against Women reported an increase in acts of gender violence allegedly perpetrated by the paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and combatants in Khartoum, South Darfur and West Darfur. As a result of the armed conflict that began in April 2023, human rights organisations estimated that the number of people who needed gender violence prevention and response services during the year increased by over one million, placing the figure at 4.2 million throughout the country. They also reported that the growth of insecurity and attacks on hospitals drastically reduced the ability to provide services to survivors. Amnesty International reported that dozens of

women and girls, some as young as 12, have suffered sexual violence by the warring factions and that some have even been held in prolonged periods of captivity in conditions of sexual slavery. The Sudanese Group for Victims of Enforced Disappearance reported 96 cases of women who were likely to have suffered rape, sexual slavery or exploitation for domestic work.[27]

In 2023, 27 of the 36 active armed conflicts occurred in countries where ILGA had documented the enforcement of legislation or policies criminalising the LGBTIQ+ population, exacerbating the impacts of violence in these contexts. 16 of the 17 high-intensity armed conflicts in 2023 (94% of cases) occurred in countries with legislation or policies criminalising the LGBTIQ+ population, namely the conflicts in Cameroon (Ambazonia/Northwest and Southwest regions), Ethiopia (Amhara), Ethiopia (Oromia), Mali, Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram), Western Sahel Region, DRC (East), DRC (East-ADF), Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Myanmar, Pakistan, Russia-Ukraine, Egypt (Sinai) Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. In the Russian invasion and armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine, only Russia was identified as a country with legislation or policies criminalising the LGBTIQ+ population, and not Ukraine, according to ILGA data.

In November 2023, the Supreme Court of **Russia** endorsed a ban on the "international LGBTI movement" and its activities and approved classifying it as "extremist" at the request of the Ministry of Justice, a ruling that could mean prison sentences for participants and organisers of activities in defence of LGBTIQ+ rights and that prohibits the use of LGBTIQ+ symbols. The Russian political and judicial authorities took various other forms of action to repress and restrict the rights of the LGBTIQ+ population during the year.[28] **On various occasions, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that the war in Ukraine was also a war for the defence of "traditional values"**. Russian feminist activists continued to oppose the war. In December 2022, the Russian Ministry of Justice had included the Russian feminist movement Feminist Anti-War Resistance on the list of "foreign agents". Activists and coordinators of this movement faced harassment from the authorities, such as frequent identification, fines, arrests, home searches and the confiscation of computers. Nevertheless, over 45 feminist groups remained active in different parts of Russia and the movement had activists in 28 countries.[29]

Setbacks in the rights of LGBTIQ+ people continued to occur in **Uganda**. On 21 March, Parliament passed a

16 of the 17 high-intensity armed conflicts in 2023 (94% of cases) occurred in countries where ILGA had documented the enforcement of legislation or policies criminalising the LGBTIQ+ population

26. Independent Assessment Mandated by Security Council Resolution 2679 (2023).
27. Suleiman, Samar, "Living Through Hell: Sudanese Women Pay the Highest Price of War", *Carnegie*, 26 March 2024.
28. Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2024*, 2024.
29. Meridiano 13, "Russian dissident Liliya Vezhevatova: 'Women are the face of protest in Russia'", *Voxeurop*, 4 October 2023.

Map 3.2. **Countries in armed conflict with legislation or policies criminalising the LGBTIQ+ population**
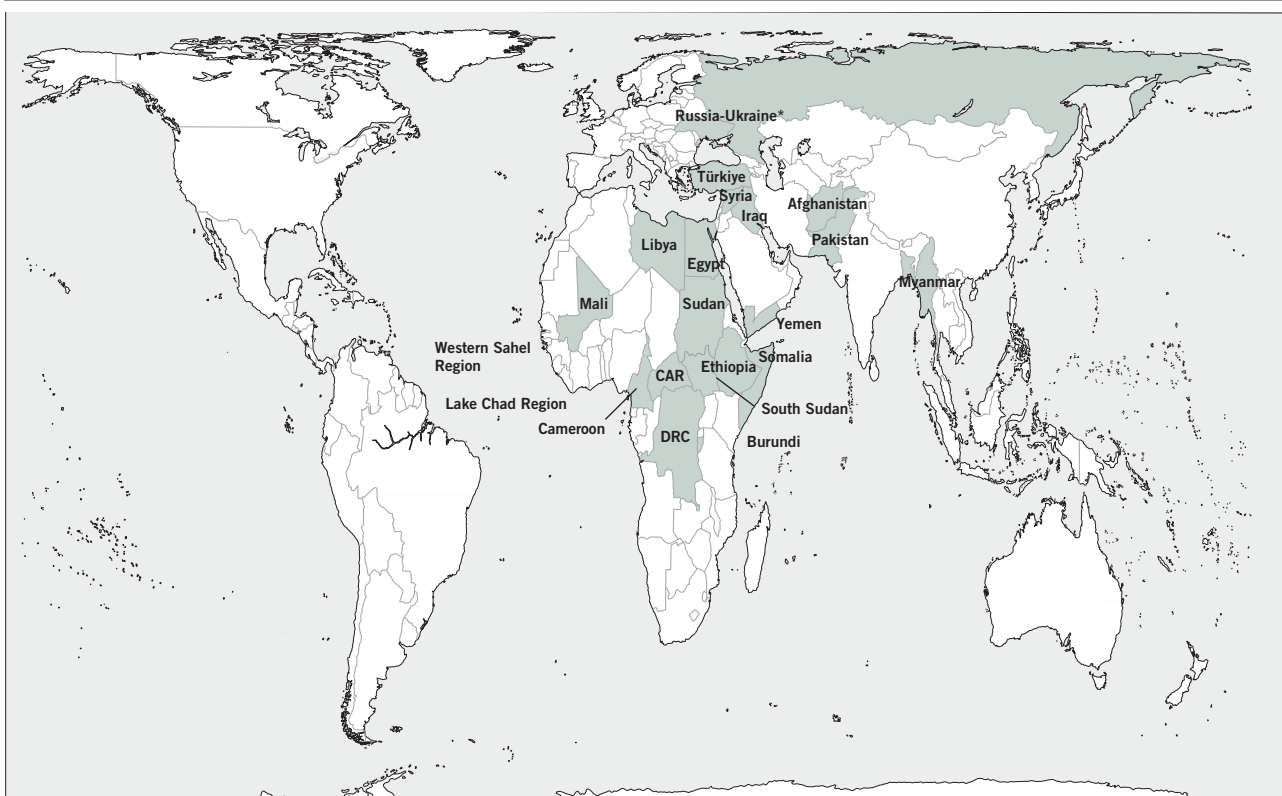
▨ Armed conflicts in countries with legislation or policies criminalising the LGBTIQ+ population

* The Russia-Ukraine armed conflict is included in this map because ILGA's report includes Russia as a country with legislation or policies criminalising the LGBTIQ+ population.

Table 3.4. **Armed conflicts in countries with criminalising legislation or policies against the LGBTIQ+ population**[30]

AFRICA	ASIA	MIDDLE EAST	EUROPE
Burundi Cameroon (Ambazonia/North West and South West) Central African Republic DRC (East) DRC (East-ADF) DRC (West) Ethiopia (Amhara) Ethiopia (Tigray) Ethiopia (Oromia) Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram) Lybia Mali Somalia Somalia (Somaliland-SSC Khatumo) South Sudan Sudan Western Sahel Region	Afghanistan Myanmar Pakistan Pakistan (Balochistan)	Egypt (Sinai) Iraq Syria Yemen	Türkiye (south-east) Russia – Ukraine*

* The Russia-Ukraine armed conflict is included in this table because ILGA's report includes Russia as a country with legislation or policies criminalising the LGBTIQ+ population.

Source: Prepared internally with data from Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Alerta 2024! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding,* Barcelona: Icaria, 2024; and Kellyn Botha, *Our identities under arrest: A global overview on the enforcement of laws criminalising consensual same-sex sexual acts between adults and diverse gender expressions*, ILGA World, 2023.

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30. This table includes armed conflicts in 2023 in countries with legislation or policies criminalising the LGBTIQ+ population.

bill strengthening the criminalisation of sexual relations between people of the same sex. The draft bill aims to expand the Sexual Offences Bill passed by Parliament in 2021, which penalises "any sexual act between people of the same gender", as well as anal sex between people of any gender, with up to 10 years in prison. In late May, the text was ratified and signed into law by President Yoweri Museveni, provoking widespread international condemnation. Ugandan activists challenged the law in court because, among other issues, it provides for the death penalty for "aggravated homosexuality", defined as cases of homosexual relations between a minor and other categories of vulnerable people, or when the perpetrator is infected with HIV. The US blasted the legislation as a "tragic violation" of human rights, announcing visa restrictions on people who "undermine the democratic process" and excluding the country from the African trade initiative for human rights violations. The World Bank also suspended loans to the country and announced a freeze on new loans to Uganda, causing the Ugandan shilling to fall to its lowest level against the US dollar in almost eight years.

Over the last year, there was an intense controversy in **Iraq** around the use of the concept of gender. Greater hostility towards LGBTIQ+ people was observed and an initiative seeking to criminalise homosexuality also raised alarm. The UN Secretary-General expressed concern about the increase in misinformation and attempts by government institutions to prohibit the use of the term "gender". Amidst questions and criticism on social media about the use of the term "gender" on the grounds that the concept promotes values that conflict with the social and religious traditions of Iraq, several ministries issued instructions with their own definitions of gender or that provided for the elimination of the concept. Given these developments, in July the secretariat of the Council of Ministers issued a circular clarifying the term and ordered it be followed in parentheses by the phrase "men and women" in all official documents. At the same time, the authority regulating the media in Iraq issued instructions in August to prohibit the use of the term "gender" and to replace the word "homosexuality" with "sexual deviation". This came as the Council of Representatives completed the first review of a proposal that seeks to reform the Anti-Prostitution Law to rename it the Anti-Prostitution and Homosexuality Law and to criminalise same-sex relationships. According to the proposal, people convicted of homosexual conduct could face life imprisonment and the death penalty. Previously, in June, after a man burned a copy of the Quran outside a mosque in Stockholm, demonstrations were reported in front of the Swedish embassy in Baghdad. Rainbow flags, a symbol of the LGBTIQ+ community, were burned during these protests. According to media reports, the Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr may have encouraged his followers to do the same.[31] In May, the Kurdistan

Regional Government also ordered the closure of the NGO Razan Organization, citing its "activities in the field of homosexuality". In 2022, Kurdish MPs had also presented a proposal to punish individual and collective activism that tried to defend the rights of the LGBTIQ+ population.[32]

During 2023, terminological debates in Iraq also focused on the concept of "women's empowerment". Thus, during his visit to the country, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said that the concepts of "gender" and "women's empowerment" do not contradict any culture, religion or tradition and stressed the need to involve more women in decision-making and in ways to address violence against women. Despite these calls, in November the secretariat of the Iraqi Council of Ministers again issued instructions to replace the term "gender" with the phrase "justice between women and men". Some Iraqi NGOs and human rights activists, especially those connected to women's organisations, expressed concern about the controversy and these instructions. They fear that the political climate around this issue will affect their programmes and advocacy work. The UN also warned that these changes compromise gender equality and lead to intimidation and harassment of women's rights activists.

3.3. Peacebuilding from a gender perspective

In this section some of the most notable initiatives are analysed to incorporate the gender perspective into the various aspects of peacebuilding.

3.3.1. Resolution 1325 and the agenda on women, peace and security

A new session of the open discussion on women, peace and security was held in October and the UN Secretary-General presented his annual report on the issue.[33] The main theme of the 2023 session was women's participation in international peace and security, in a discussion in which they warned about the international setbacks in women's political participation and the advance of authoritarianism, with misogyny being a central part of the discourse and policies of many authoritarian governments, as described by the UN Secretary-General in his annual report on women, peace and security. The Secretary General also said that in 2022, the year to which the data collected for the report issued in 2023 refers, 614 million women and girls lived in contexts affected by armed conflict. The report indicated that women participated as negotiators

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31. Saad, Ahmed, "Koran burning in Sweden sparks protest in Baghdad", *Reuters*, 29 June 2023.
32. Human Rights Watch, "Iraq", *World Report 2024*, *Human Rights Watch*. 11 January 2024.
33. UN Secretary-General, *Women and peace and security. Report of the Secretary-General*, S/2023/725, 28 September 2023.

Table 3.5. Countries with 1325 National Action Plans participating in peace negotiations and processes

Cameroon (2017)	Philippines (2009)
CAR (2014)	Armenia (2019)
Chad (2023)	Azerbaijan (2020)
DRC (2010)	Cyprus (2020)
Mali (2012)	Georgia (2018)
Morocco (2022)	Moldova (2018)
Mozambique (2019)	Serbia (2017)
Senegal (2011)	Kosovo (2014)
Somalia (2021	Ukraine (2016)
South Sudan (2015)	Palestine (2015)
Sudan (2020)	Yemen (2019)
Korea (2014)	

*In parentheses, the year that the National Action Plan was approved

or delegates representing the parties in conflict in four of the five UN-facilitated peace processes in 2022. All these peace processes had space for consultation with women's civil society organisations and expert advice on gender was available. However, despite this representation in peace processes led or co-led by the United Nations, there was a decline in participation for the second year in a row, tumbling from 23% in 2020 to 19% in 2021 and 18% in 2022. This setback once again revealed the deterioration in the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda and the lack of commitment of the governments and actors in conflict. The report also noted that 33% of the peace agreements signed in 2022 (six of the 18 agreements reached that year) included clauses referring to women, girls or gender. Thus, the report's assessment of women's involvement in peace processes and the inclusion of gender issues in the different peace agreements reached was not at all positive, since in addition to the setback identified in 2022, the data pointed to a regressive trend in an international context of fierce armed conflict and increased violence.

In 2023, 23 countries involved in peace negotiations had a National Action Plan in place to promote the participation of women in these processes. Eleven of these countries were in Africa (Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Morocco, Mozambique, CAR, DRC, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan); two in Asia (South Korea and the Philippines); eight in Europe (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Georgia, Moldova, Serbia, Kosovo, and Ukraine); and two in the Middle East (Palestine and Yemen). Neither of the countries in the Americas with ongoing negotiations had a National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Thus, in 27 of the 45 active negotiations during 2023, at least one of the negotiating government actors had a plan of action that

was supposed to guide its activity in terms of inclusion of the gender perspective and women's participation. The 27 negotiations and peace processes took place in Cameroon (Ambazonia/Northwest and Southwest), Chad, Ethiopia-Egypt-Sudan, Mali, Morocco–Western Sahara, Mozambique, CAR, DRC, Senegal (Casamance), South Sudan, Sudan, Sudan-South Sudan, Korea (Republic of Korea - DPRK, the Philippines (MILF), the Philippines (NDF), Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh), Cyprus, Georgia (Abkhazia, South Ossetia), Moldova (Transdniestria), Serbia-Kosovo, Russia-Ukraine, Israel-Palestine, Palestine and Yemen. However, even if they had this tool, most peace negotiations continued to exclude women and did not include the gender perspective into their dynamics, calling into question the effectiveness of action plans as inclusive peacebuilding tools.

The UN-Secretary General's report noted a regressive trend in women's involvement in peace negotiations

At the beginning of the year, the government of **Chad** unveiled its National Action Plan for the period 2023-2027 to promote the women, peace and security agenda, prepared with the support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Swiss cooperation and Spanish cooperation. The process was based on proposals made by more than 200 women leaders who participated in training sessions on women, peace and security and on preventing violent extremism. Over the course of several years, the plan was drafted and validated by various ministries and stakeholders, who also received training on Resolution 1325 and the women, peace and security agenda.

In March 2023, the government of **Moldova** approved its second National Action Plan on women, peace and security (2023-2027). Two of the plan's five "general objectives" were devoted to the security and defence sector, though no "general objective" was related to conflict prevention or resolution or to peacebuilding.[34]

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34. Government of Moldova, *Action Plan implementing the National Programme on the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security for 2023-2027*, 2023.

The general objectives of the new action plan were to: 1) boost women's participation and representation in the security and defence sector; 2) prevent inequalities, violence and harassment in the security and defence sector by reducing the risks and eliminating the consequences of discrimination; 3) providing protection through good governance and capacity-building; 4) rehabilitating the affected population through effective, sustainable and intelligent measures; 5) providing humanitarian support for women and girls in conflict and post-conflict areas; and 6) promoting communication and accountability. As part of "specific objective 1" of "general objective 1", the plan included action aimed at building professional capacities through training and the transfer of knowledge and experiences for women and female mediators, women and men in mixed teams and multidisciplinary teams working on conflict resolution. The scope of this action was measured in an indicator referring to the establishment of a training course in which at least 50 women are trained and involved in conflict resolution. The plan includes actions aimed at promoting women's rights in times of peace and conflict and respecting the rights of women, girls and women with children in conflict and post-conflict situations. The Moldovan Ministry of the Interior noted that the new National Action Plan included actions to be implemented jointly with local authorities for the first time. The estimated cost of the action plan, according to the Ministry of the Interior, was 23.6 million lei, to be financed by state budgets and assistance from development actors.

The thematic report on the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda, led by MP and rapporteur Teona Akubardia, was submitted to the Gender Equality Council of the Parliament of **Georgia** in 2023. According to the Georgian Parliament, the report's recommendations included facilitating women's effective involvement in the Geneva International Discussions (GIDs, the name of the peace negotiating process involving Georgia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Russia, as well as the UN, EU and US as co-facilitators) and in the incident prevention and response mechanisms (IPRMs).[35] It also recommended addressing women's participation in decision-making in the security and defence sector; the integration of the gender perspective in human security, including in relation to the internally displaced population; the development of a conflict-related sexual harassment prevention policy; and guarantees of parliamentary supervision of compliance with the recommendations and the involvement of civil society in that process.

In March, under the leadership of the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare, **South Sudan**

approved the second National Action Plan on the women, peace and security agenda (2023-2027). The new action plan calls on the government to fund its implementation rather than relying on donors and foresees its development at the state and local levels, so its activities focus more on the situations of local communities. It also ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (known as the Maputo Protocol).[36] Ratification mandates a commitment to gender equality and urges the country's authorities to adopt effective policies and strategies to ensure that the protocol makes a difference in people's lives.

In mid-December, in the **Philippines**, the Office of the Presidential Advisor on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity (OPRARU), the Philippine Commission on Women, UN Women and several national and international women's rights organisations publicly announced the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security for the period from 2023 to 2033. This plan is the fourth since the first was approved in 2010. The OPRARU highlighted that the national plan also addressed emerging realities such as climate action and cyber and maritime security and called on civil society organisations to support its implementation. According to some analysts, the new action plan pays special attention to the creation of spaces and mechanisms to mitigate sexual and gender-based violence to strengthen and encourage the active participation of women with diverse and intersectional identities in conflict prevention, resolution and transformation, and also in establishing peace. Several of the authorities who participated in the plan's launch event said that the Philippines was one of the pioneering countries in Asia to have an instrument of this type and to address the women, peace and security agenda.

In **Haiti**, according to the report of the UN Secretary-General on the BINUH released in October, efforts were made in 2023 to launch a National Action Plan to implement Resolution 1325 (2000) with the establishment of peace and mediation committees in the departments of Ouest, Centre and Artibonite. BINUH and UN Women engaged women's organisations and networks to enhance peacebuilding and mediation efforts and improve participation in public policy development to reduce community violence. In July, UN Women held 12 consultative meetings on reducing community violence in the departments of Ouest, Centre and Artibonite that were attended by political leaders and members of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Rights and women's organisations. During the meetings, it was agreed to establish three networks of women mediators and peacebuilders.

35. Parliament of Georgia, "Presentation by the Gender Equality Council of the report on 'Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Georgia'", 27 September 2023.
36. Tut Pur, Nyagoah, "South Sudan Ratifies Crucial African Women's Rights Treaty", *Human Rights Watch*, 8 June 2023.

3.3.2. Gender in peace negotiations

Several peace processes were relevant from a gender point of view during the year 2023.[37] Women's organisations demanded greater participation in different negotiations around the world as well as the inclusion of gender agendas. However, in most of the negotiating processes, significant changes were not implemented to include the participation of women in a significant way.

In late 2022, international contacts and initiatives promoted by Türkiye and Norway were relaunched to address the dispute between **Somalia and Somaliland**, which had been at an impasse for three decades. After many different initiatives to bring the parties closer, these efforts culminated in a meeting in December 2023 between the presidents of both administrations in Djibouti. Special Representative Heidi Johansen participated in the Norwegian delegation. The government of Somaliland designated the former Minister of Health and of Foreign Affairs, Edna Adan, a nationally and internationally recognised figure, as its envoy to the process, which gave it a boost. Edna Adan is considered a symbol in the fight for women's rights in Somalia and has been the president of the UNPO, the organisation of stateless nations in the world, since 2022. Edna Adan has received many awards, including the Templeton Prize in June 2023 for her work in peacebuilding and her fight against female genital mutilation in the Horn of Africa from the hospital that bears her name in Hargeisa, the capital of Somaliland. This award highlighted the traditional role of Somali women's organisations in promoting peace-building and dialogue initiatives with the aim of trying to overcome the divisions surrounding the conflict in Somalia. Exploratory contacts in late 2022 and during 2023 culminated in a meeting between the presidents of Somalia and Somaliland in Djibouti on 28 and 29 December 2023, producing an optimist atmosphere. However, this historic meeting was overshadowed by Ethiopia and Somaliland's announcement on 1 January 2024 that they had signed a memorandum of understanding, triggering a serious diplomatic crisis between them and Somalia.[38]

Although the gender-related provisions on the peace agreement in **South Sudan** (R-ARCSS)[39] include a quota of 35% female participation in all institutions and executive and transition processes, it remained unfulfilled in most of the commissions created to implement the peace agreement, as well as the current government and Parliament. In the bodies created during 2023, the agreed quota of women's representation was only met in the Council of Political Parties (40%), but not in the National Constitutional Review Commission (32%) or in the National Electoral Commission (22%). This was also not true in the election of state governors, where only one of South Sudan's 10 governors is a woman.

As part of the intra-Haitian dialogue process to try to resolve the political crisis gripping **Haiti**, a national political forum on electoral and constitutional reform, democratic governance and the socio-economic and security situation was held in Port-au-Prince in late May. Community leaders from every department in the country and more than 350 representatives (including about 130 women) from political and social organisations in Haiti participated in the conference. In her attempts to facilitate the political dialogue, the UN Secretary General's Special Representative María Isabel Salvador met with some of these women. In early June, she informed the Security Council's Informal Experts Group on Women, Peace and Security of the progress made in the dialogue process and the results of the national political forum held in May. During this forum, the prime minister at the time, Ariel Henry, and the president of the High Council for the Transition, Mirlande Manigat, stressed the need to continue the national dialogue led by Haiti to create the political and security conditions necessary to allow elections to be held. Senator Mirlande Manigat had been appointed at the beginning of the year as president of the High Council for the Transition, an organisation whose objectives include the promotion of national dialogue in the search for consensus on the main lines of action for the transition period, particularly in matters of public security, the Constitution, elections, economic reform, justice, the rule of law, social and food security.

In September 2023, the UN Secretary-General's personal envoy for **Western Sahara**, Staffan de Misura, was finally able to visit the Moroccan-controlled territory and meet with women's organisations. Rabat had previously objected to the diplomatic representative's meetings with Saharawi civil society activists, prompting De Mistura to refuse to travel there as a way to emphasise the need to remain consistent with the principles of the UN and particularly with commitments to women's involvement in the promotion of peace and security.

The situation of women in **Libya** continued to be influenced by the institutional division and deadlock that, for yet another year, prevented elections from being held in the context of the negotiations to seek a political solution for the country. Moreover, these

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37. For more exhaustive information on the incorporation of a gender perspective in currently active peace processes, see the yearbook of Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace talks in focus 2023. Report on trends and scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.
38. See the summary on Somalia-Somaliland in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace talks in focus 2023. Report on trends and scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.
39. UN Women, "Members of the Security Council's Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security visit South Sudan", *UN Women*, 15 December 2023.

elections should have taken place in December 2021. Libyan women continued to demand guarantees of greater participation in the electoral political process. The high-level election panel organised a conference in Tripoli in May on strengthening women's participation in elections that was attended by representatives from 12 Arab countries. The need to guarantee the inclusion of women in all stages of the electoral process was emphasised during the conference. Women's groups met with various political representatives to underscore their demand that electoral rules allow for women's meaningful representation in the future Parliament. However, the laws approved in the second half of the year set a minimum quota of only six of the 60 seats in the Senate for women, much lower than the 20% that had been established after the electoral reform.

In **Syria**, as in Libya, the possibilities of women's involvement in forums of political dialogue on the future of the country were determined by the persistent impasse in the negotiations, particularly the UN-promoted track known as the Geneva process. The Constitutional Committee established as part of this process, in which women make up 29% of the represented delegations, continued without meeting since its discussions were called off in June 2022. During 2023, the UN special envoy for Syria continued meeting with women delegates to the Constitutional Committee and those who make up the Syrian Women's Advisory Board (WAB). The WAB continued to receive criticism due to its level of representativeness. After eight years of work by the WAB, the special envoy's office launched a call to renew its members. In 2023, UN Women also emphasised the importance of supporting the role of Syrian women in track 2 and 3 diplomatic initiatives, in community mediation and local dialogue.

Activists in **Yemen** continued to complain of women's exclusion from formal negotiations. Together with other marginalised groups, they voiced concern about the ongoing negotiations between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis without the participation of other constituent parts of Yemeni society. In this context, several representatives held a meeting in Jordan with the UN special envoy for Yemen and insisted that their demand for inclusion in the deliberations on the future of Yemen is not a privilege, but a right and a guarantee for sustainable peace. The priorities they identified for a future political agreement for the country included a ceasefire, the reopening of roads and payment of the salaries of public sector workers. They also stressed the need for confidence-building measures such as the release of all prisoners, maps that facilitate demining and a promise not to make new arbitrary arrests. Some analysts highlighted the crucial peacebuilding work that

Yemeni women have continued to do despite the many obstacles and impacts of the armed conflict, such as by supporting programmes for reintegrating child soldiers, opening humanitarian corridors and mediating in tribal disputes.

3.3.3. Civil society initiatives

Different peacebuilding initiatives led and carried out by women's civil society organisations took place in 2023. This section reviews some of the most relevant ones.

Since the beginning of armed clashes in **Sudan** in April between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces (RSF), different dialogue initiatives promoted by women have emerged, calling for a ceasefire, stressing humanitarian needs and condemning the sexual violence related to the conflict. These initiatives also demanded women's participation in negotiations to end the violence, as well as in any future political process, blasting the failures to include them in both. In late October, UN Women organised a conference with Sudanese women peacebuilders in Kampala (Uganda) in partnership with the IGAD, the African Union and the International Women's Centre for Peace. Attended by over 400 women from 14 Sudanese states, the conference aimed to build bridges between women in Sudan and countries in the region and highlighted the leadership role that Sudanese women and girls are playing in the peace movement.[40]

In early December, around 300 people from all over **Haiti**, mostly women, participated in the "National Conference on Preventing and Managing Electoral and Political Violence against Women in Haiti", which enjoyed the participation and collaboration of UN Women. The main objective of the conference was to help to structure the inter-Haitian national dialogue around the issue of gender sensitivity in the national democratic process. One of the aspects addressed at the conference was the action taken and mechanisms set up to reduce violence against women in electoral processes and analyse their impact on women's political participation and dynamics of development in Haiti.

The networking efforts of peacebuilders from **Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia** increased in 2023 against a background of deterioration in recent years, including situations of tension and conflict in those regions. Dozens of women activists participated in a two-day interregional and intergenerational conference in Istanbul (Türkiye) in June organised by the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP) with the support of the OSCE.[41] It included participants

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40. UN Women, "Sudanese women advocate for peace at conference in Uganda", *UN Women*, 22 December 2023.
41. Kostava, Natia and Sophia Farion, "GNWP Reports from Istanbul, Türkiye: 'Women's Networks WIN Together' Regional Conference on Networks across Women Peacebuilders and Mediators in Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia", *GNWP*, 24 August 2023; OSCE, "OSCE brings together women peacebuilders and mediators from Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia to discuss common priorities and advocacy strategies", *OSCE*, 12 February 2024.

from Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The meeting was aimed at strengthening networks active in the women, peace and security agenda and gender equality in these regions. The conference met for a second time in February 2024 in Vienna (Austria), where the participants explored strategies to enhance networking. Among other recommendations, they stressed the importance of flexible, long-term financial support for women peacebuilders and mediators. Women from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan also jointly participated in a project led by Kyrgyzstan's Foundation for Tolerance International (FTI), a member of the international network Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), to promote dialogue between them and empower them to try to influence the peace negotiations and political decision-making processes in the region. The networking included trauma-sensitive dialogue facilitation methodologies.[42]

The Network of Women Mediators of **South Caucasus** (NWMSC) was still involved in transforming the conflicts in the region and in promoting women's participation in peacebuilding in the area. In 2023, they published a study that included an analysis of the current situation of the various conflicts in the region and recommendations based on individual and group interviews with civil society actors involved in peacebuilding from different sectors. These actors identified a profound lack of trust, the reactivation of trauma in different populations as a result of the war in Ukraine and concerns about human security, resource degradation, reintegration (including of ex-combatants), violence against women and children, the impacts of militarisation and economic issues. They also made recommendations about the need for direct dialogue between the parties in conflict and public diplomacy.[43]

In **Russia and Ukraine**, female relatives of soldiers staged protests demanding their demobilisation and return. The demand gained more visibility in Russia in November when around 30 women in a march led by the Communist Party in Moscow openly demanded the return of their family members mobilised for the war, though they specified that they were not opposed to it. According to the media, hundreds of women organised around this demand after the event.[44] In December, the Telegram channel *Put Domoy* ("The way home") had 35,000 members. It had been created in September. According to analysts, the Russian authorities did not harass or imprison the participants because many of them took positions defending the Kremlin.[45] Some participants said that it was a mixed movement, with different views on the war, but that the Kremlin's lack of response to their requests may have turned opinion against it.[46] The families of soldiers linked to *Put Domoy* took various actions, such as sending letters, placing stickers and engaging in some street protests. In September 2022, Russia issued a mobilisation decree affecting tens of thousands of men (up to 300,000, according to some media outlets). The authorities are not allowing for their demobilisation and have not established any rotation system, forcing the mobilised men to remain on the war front. The Russian authorities refused to issue permits to organise protests, allegedly citing restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic in some cases. To counter *Put Domoy*, the Russian government is promoting two pro-war and pro-regime women's movements, *Katyusha* and *Zhenskoe Dvizhenie*.[47] There were also some protests by female relatives of military personnel in Ukraine, demanding that they be relieved and return home.

In June 2023, the United Nations General Assembly approved the creation of a specific body charged with clarifying the fate of thousands of people who have disappeared in **Syria** since the armed conflict started in 2011. The Independent Institution on Missing Persons was established by Resolution 301/77 via the initiative of many Syrian civil society organisations such as Families for Freedom, the Caesar Families Association and Syrian Campaign. Women are greatly involved in activism and advocacy work for these organisations, given that the vast majority of the missing people are men. It is estimated that more than 155,000 people have disappeared during the Syrian armed conflict between March 2011 and August 2023. Most of the missing are attributed to Bashar Assad's regime (more than 135,000, including 8,500 women), while armed groups may be responsible for the rest.

42. GPPAC, "Beyond borders in Central Asia: Why is women's involvement in regional peacebuilding crucial?", *GPPAC*, 4 March 2024; GPPAC, "Women Leading Peace. Raising women's voices in peace processes in Central Asia", *GPPAC*, 2023.
43. Network of Women Mediators of South Caucasus, *Is there a key to conflict resolution in the South Caucasus?*, NWMSC, 2023.
44. Vitkine, Benoît, "Russian women's groups protest against 'endless mobilization' of soldiers", *Le Monde,* 23 November 2023.
45. Sauer, Pjotr, "'We're tired of being good girls': Russia's military wives and mothers protest against Putin", *The Guardian*, 25 December 2023.
46. Ibid.
47. The Moscow Times, "Authorities Fund Kremlin-Loyal Women's Movements to Foil Protesting Families of Mobilized Soldiers – Holod", *The Moscow Times*, 26 December 2023.

4. Opportunities for peace

After analysing the year 2023 from the perspective of conflicts and peacebuilding,[1] in this chapter the UAB's School for a Culture of Peace highlights five areas that are opportunities for peace in the future. They are contexts where there is, or has been, an armed conflict or socio-political crisis in the past where a series of factors converge that could lead to a positive transformation. The opportunities for peace identified refer to the resumption of contacts between Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan on the management of historical disputes regarding the Nile basin; the impact that the opposition's victory in the March 2024 presidential elections may have on the political crisis that Senegal has gone through in recent years; the resumption of the dialogue process in southern Thailand after almost a decade of Military Junta (2014-2019) or a Government emerging from it (2019-2023); the dialogue options regarding the status of the divided island of Cyprus based on the rapprochement between Greece and Türkiye in 2023 or the appointment of a personal envoy of the UN Secretary General with the mandate to carry out good offices to explore bases of agreement to advance the resolution of the conflict; or the potential of the so-called Summit of the Future –convened by the UN Secretary General for 2024– to promote multilateralism, the governance of global crises, peacebuilding or the women, peace and security agenda.

All these opportunities for peace will require the effort and real commitment of the parties involved and, where appropriate, the support of international actors so that the synergies and positive factors already present foster peacebuilding. As such, the analysis by the School for a Culture of Peace aims to provide a realistic vision of these scenarios and themes, identifying the positive aspects that encourage expectations of change while also highlighting the existing difficulties and problems that could hinder their crystallisation as opportunities for peace.

Map 4.1. **Opportunities for peace**
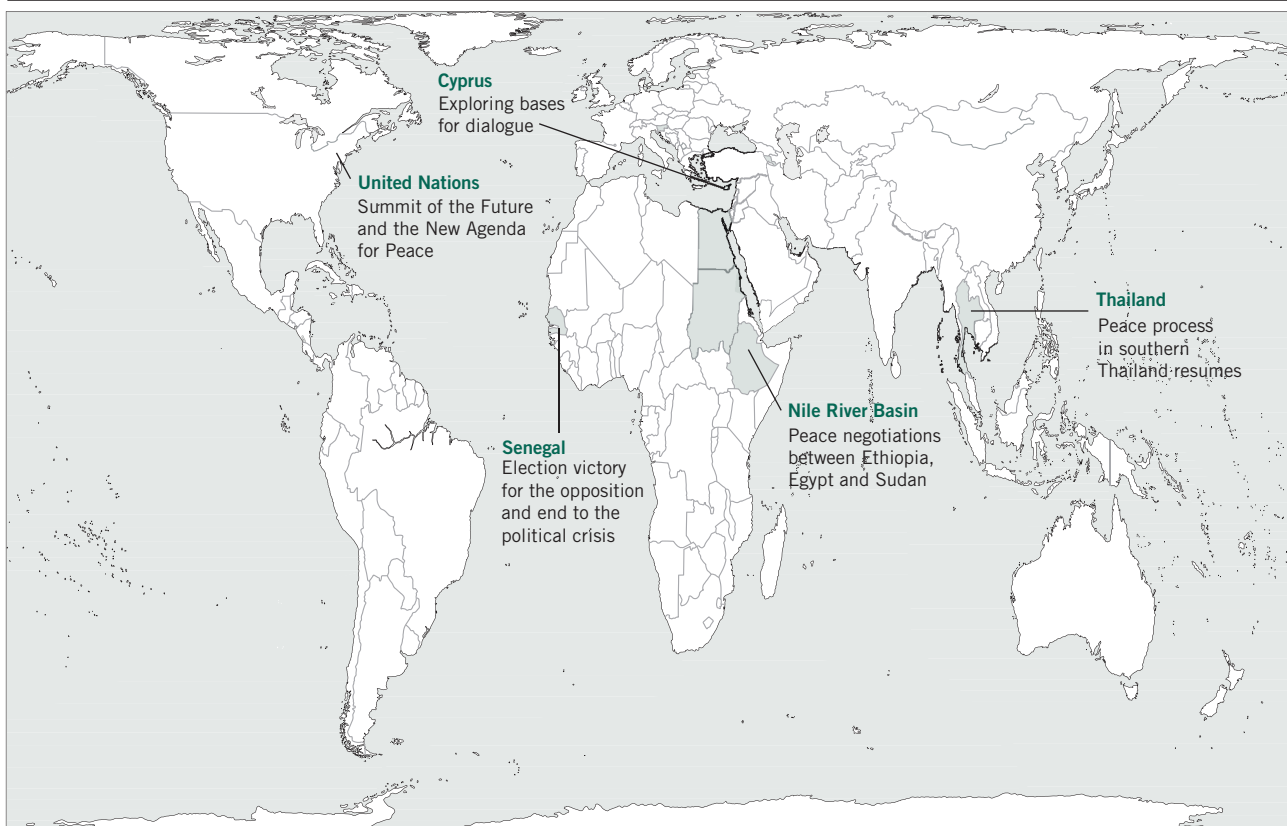
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1. The analysis of each context is based on the yearly review of the events that occurred in 2023 and includes some important factors and dynamics of the first four months of 2024.

4.1. Hopes for peace in the Nile River Basin?

The Nile River has been at the heart of disputes in the Horn of Africa and East Africa for decades.[2] Historically, the Nile Basin has been dominated by unilateral and exclusionary policies conducted by Egypt and Sudan, which in turn have used the colonial legacy to justify their monopoly on the use of the shared water resource, instead of viewing it as part of a complex and fragile ecosystem to manage given the severe climate emergency. Since 2011, Ethiopia's construction of the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the course of the Blue Nile, a tributary of the Nile that runs through its territory, has exacerbated the situation and the tension between Ethiopia and Egypt, and to a lesser extent, Sudan. However, direct contacts between the three countries resumed in 2023, which could present an opportunity to begin laying the foundations for resolving this historical dispute. Although the regional context gives little reason for optimism due to the rising tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia and between Eritrea and Ethiopia, as well as the different armed conflicts raging in the Ethiopian regions of Oromia and Amhara, the devastating war in Sudan and the reports of ongoing genocide by Israel in Gaza, with direct consequences for Egypt, this same deterioration could be an opportunity that pushes these three countries to resolve a dispute that requires their joint cooperation.

In recent years, initiatives to reduce tension between the three countries have proliferated. However, not only do they fail to agree on any result, but they are unable to agree on the mediation mechanism. Egypt prefers to internationalise the issue while Ethiopia prefers regional mediation by the AU. Egypt and al-Burhan's government in Sudan want a legally binding agreement that affects how Ethiopia fills the dam in times of drought, which Ethiopia considers unacceptable. In 2015, the leaders of the three countries signed the GERD Declaration of Principles, which stressed their commitment to cooperate and peacefully resolve their differences, but with no results to date. In late 2019, the three countries resumed talks with the United States and the World Bank (WB) as observers, though Ethiopia abandoned the talks in 2020, arguing that the US and the WB were violating the framework of impartiality as observers by proposing measures that favoured Cairo. During 2020, the EU and South Africa (as the country that holds the presidency of the AU) joined them as observers. The AU took the lead in facilitating the dialogue. However, tripartite talks facilitated by the AU have been stalled since 2021 and the 2022 Abu Dhabi initiative also failed.

The tension clearly escalated in 2022 when Ethiopia announced that it had unilaterally completed the third phase of filling the reservoir and the start of hydropower production, provoking reactions from Sudan and Egypt. Cairo threatened Ethiopia, saying it would do everything possible to stop the process. It protested against Ethiopia's decision before the UN Security Council in February and July 2022, holding Ethiopia responsible for any impact that the situation could have on Egypt. However, after months of impasse, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi met on 13 July for the first time since the 2019 Sochi summit. Their meeting came during the Summit of Neighbouring States of Sudan held in Cairo on 12-13 July, aimed at helping to promote peace in relation to the instability affecting Sudan. They issued a joint statement agreeing to restart talks on the GERD to reach a final agreement on filling and managing the dam in four months,[3] which was considered a historic announcement.[4] The deal came after Ethiopia promised to ensure that Egypt and Sudan received sufficient water flow during the fourth annual filling, which could last until September. Thus, they agreed to resume direct talks to reach an agreement. However, in the four negotiating rounds held since then (27-28 August, in Cairo; 23-24 September, in Addis Abeba; 23-24 October, in Cairo; and 17-19 December, in Addis Abeba), the parties failed to make any progress.[5] In September, two weeks after the first round, the Ethiopian prime minister announced that Ethiopia had completed the fourth and final filling of the reservoir. Egypt blasted the decision, describing it as unilateral and illegal. Egypt and Sudan insisted on first reaching a binding agreement with Ethiopia on filling and operating the dam to ensure a continuous flow of water from the Nile River.

In 2022, Ethiopia announced that it had started producing electricity. Thus, in February 2022, the dam produced power through its first turbine and delivered it to the grid at a speed of 375 MW. A second 375 MW turbine was put in service in August 2022, though there were plans for the installation of another 11 turbines producing 400 MW each.[6] However, Ethiopia's grid is not sufficiently developed to absorb the additional capacity that the GERD can produce, which analysts claim could rise to an installed capacity of 5.15 GW (16,000 GW/hour per year). Transmission and distribution networks are either non-existent or under construction in most parts of the country and there is a

2. See "The Nile Basin: cooperation or conflict" in chapter 5 (Risk scenarios for 2021) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Alert 2021! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding,* Barcelona: Icaria, 2021.
3. Joint Statement on Ethiopia – Egypt Relation, "Ethiopia, Egypt agree to finalize GERD filling, rules of operations agreement in four months", Addis Standard, 13 July 2023.
4. Addis Standard, "Ethiopia, Egypt agree to finalize GERD filling, rules of operations agreement in four months", *Addis Standard*, 13 July 2023.
5. Reuters, "Egypt says talks over Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam have failed - statement", *Reuters*, 20 December 2023.
6. BBC, "Ethiopia starts generating power from River Nile dam", *BBC*, 20 February 2022; Africanews, "Ethiopia announces that second turbine in GERD is in operation", *Africanews*, 11 August 2022.

lack of adequate high-voltage links with its neighbours to support the export of electricity.[7] Beyond the technical components, the project would require cooperation and integration between neighbouring economies, which is not happening at the moment. Furthermore, no credible environmental impact study has been carried out on the dam, despite the large amounts of sediment it retains, at a time when the negative impacts of human action on the climate are increasingly obvious.[8]

Moreover, all three countries are being subjected to instability and conflict, with regional dynamics of division and the creation of blocs.[9] The deteriorating security situation in Sudan and Ethiopia during 2023, as well as the war in Gaza, have become distractions for all three countries' negotiating efforts. They have also become more entrenched in lines of dispute. During 2023, Egypt negotiated with the government of Somalia to establish a military base there.[10] Although the base is expected to be a training camp for the Somali Army, it will also be a base for the Egyptian Army in Somalia, where the Egyptian Security Services (GIS) will carry out activities as an outpost on neighbouring Ethiopia in the case of a hypothetical military offensive. Ethiopia viewed the construction of this military base with concern. According to analysts, Egypt wanted the base to be built in Puntland, but successive local governments in Puntland refused, considering it a potential source of instability due to its regional implications. Ethiopia responded immediately and on 1 January 2024, it reached a memorandum of understanding with Somaliland by which it supposedly recognised the independence of Somaliland in exchange for the cession of part of its territory.[11] As a self-proclaimed independent region of Somalia with disputed status, Somaliland lacks the international legal capacity to decide over its territory.[12] Ethiopia's offer to recognise Somaliland in exchange for the lease of more than 20 kilometres of Somaliland's coast to grant it port and naval access to the Gulf of Aden provoked a new diplomatic row between Somalia and Ethiopia, allies of convenience in the fight against al-Shabaab. At the same time, in the current Sudanese Civil War, Egypt, Eritrea, South Sudan and Somalia support General al-Burhan and the Sudanese Armed Forces,[13] while Ethiopia and the UAE back his rival Hemedti, the leader of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, drawing new regional lines of division over

those that already exist.[14] Egypt is supported by most of the Arab League, as clearly stated in the Jeddah Declaration issued during the Arab League summit in May 2023, which condemns Ethiopia's unilateral filling of the dam and demands that the UN Security Council become more involved in the issue. Still, the pressure on Ethiopia had no effect.

After the failure of the four tripartite rounds between August and December 2023, there are no new meetings planned in the short term to resolve the conflict. However, as the GERD becomes fully operational and the waters of the Nile become even more susceptible to climate change, the dispute could become even more important for the three countries and the region in general, so political negotiations will be essential. Instability in Ethiopia and now in Sudan and Gaza has clearly been a distraction from negotiating efforts, allowing Ethiopia increasingly and unrestrainedly to continue to establish the GERD as a fait accompli. In early 2024, Ethiopia announced that the dam was already 94% complete.[15] The fact that the status quo on the ground has changed suggests that the three parties to the conflict need to resume the negotiations with a new mandate, or at least a more scientific and less political and confrontational attitude, since the GERD is not going to disappear, according to various analysts.[16] Egypt should leave behind its policy of making threats and start studying the positive aspects of the GERD. Ethiopia should act less unilaterally in its management of the dam and be more responsive to Egypt and Sudan's needs for guarantees over their vital water supplies. Ethiopia is aware that the dam is now full enough that any threat of military attack to damage it is totally unlikely as it would flood Sudan, so the reality on the ground is forcing negotiations that support its interests. However, one of Ethiopia's initial objectives and arguments encouraging its neighbours to support the GERD, to export energy and ensure orderly management of the waters of the Nile River for the benefit of the region, has been postponed and subject to Ethiopian decision-making. If its full potential is not used and developed, the GERD may become a white elephant project,[17] similar to the INGA I and II dams and the INGA III project in the DRC. The GERD has been built at a time when it has been shown that these megaprojects can be dangerous for basins such as the fragile Nile, especially in light of the growing impact of climate change.

7. Woldemariam, Yohannes and Genevieve Donnellon-May, "The politics of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam", *Climate Diplomacy*, 2 February 2024.
8. Ibid.
9. See the section on the Horn of Africa in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises).
10. Qoobey, Jibril, "INFORMATION: Egypt is establishing a military base in central Somalia", *Idilnews*, 16 August 2023.
11. Faisal, Ali, "Ethiopia and Somaliland reach agreement over access to ports", *The Guardian*, 1 January 2024..
12. Somaliland remains officially part of the Republic of Somalia, although the central government has not been able to control Somaliland since 1991 and the region calls attention to its stability and democracy (with Western-type political institutions coexisting with traditional institutions) compared to neighbouring Somalia.
13. ADF, "Al-Burhan Tries Shuttle Diplomacy to Achieve What Has Failed Militarily," *ADF*, 3 October 2023.
14. Al Jazeera, "Leader of Sudan's RSF visits Ethiopia in rare foreign trip as war rages", *Al Jazeera*, 28 December 2023.
15. Actaç, Tufan, "Ethiopia completes 94% of controversial Renaissance Dam", *Anadolu Agency*, 5 January 2024.
16. Fabricius, Peter, "GERD is a fait accompli, so it's time to get real", *ISS*, 28 April 2023.
17. A "white elephant" is a concept used in architecture to describe an unfinished structure whose high costs make it difficult to maintain. In disuse, it can be a source of corruption, characteristic of Africa in the 1960s and 1970s.

4.2. Senegal: The opposition wins the presidential election, seemingly ending the political crisis in the country

After three years of tension between the government of President Macky Sall and the opposition, which set off a major political crisis, Senegal's presidential election on 24 March 2024 was won by opposition leader Bassirou Diomaye Faye. Thus, Senegal seems to have ended one of the most difficult and controversial periods in its political history, paving the way for a new government that faces major political, economic and social challenges.

The political crisis in the country dates back to 2019, when Ousmane Sonko, a young man from the southern region of Casamance, ran for election leading the party Senegalese Patriots for Work, Ethics and Fraternity (PASTEF, its French acronym). His anti-colonial political platform criticises the economic control exercised by France and promises greater sovereignty, eliminating the CFA franc and renegotiating mining and oil agreements. Sonko finished third in the race, but his stature grew throughout the country. In February 2021, Sonko was arrested and accused of rape, causing his followers to take to the streets, believing that it was a move to end his presidential candidacy. Though acquitted of the rape charge, Sonko was sentenced to two years in prison for "corrupting the youth" in 2023, which de facto disqualified him from the presidential election. The government later dissolved PASTEF. This sparked new demonstrations and protests across the country that were harshly put down. The rise in tension prompted President Macky Sall to announce that he would not run for re-election, for what would have been his third term of office. This had been one of the central issues behind the protests of the opposition, which accused Sall of violating the Senegalese Constitution, since it only allows two terms.

In the midst of the political crisis, three weeks before the presidential election, scheduled for 25 February 2024, Sall announced that it would be postponed for an unspecified period, making it the first time in the history of the country that a presidential election was put off. On 5 February, the Senegalese Parliament voted to delay the presidential election until 15 December in a chaotic voting process that took place after opposition lawmakers were expelled by the chamber's security forces when they tried to block it. Parliament also approved extending Sall's term, which was supposed to end on 2 April, until the new election was held. The decision triggered intense protests in various parts of the country. The government restricted access to the

In just 11 days, opposition candidate Bassirou Diomaye Faye went from being in prison to winning the election as the youngest president in the history of Senegal

Internet. The growth of the protests and of the political crisis in the country caused the West African regional bloc ECOWAS and other countries to urge Sall to reverse the decision.

In a historic ruling on 15 February, Senegal's Constitutional Council struck down a presidential decree issued by the outgoing president to postpone the presidential election, ruling that Article 103 of the Constitution prohibits any changes to the number or duration of the presidential term of office. The Constitutional Council found that if President Sall remained in power after his term ended on 2 April, it would violate the Constitution. Recognising that it would not be possible to hold the election on 25 February, as initially planned, the Constitutional Council ordered for it to be held as soon as possible. Thus, 15 of the 20 candidates approved to run in the presidential election signed a joint statement asking that the new vote be held no later than 2 April, the day that Sall's term officially ended. The statement was signed by some of the main candidates, including detained opposition candidate Bassirou Diomaye Faye and former Dakar Mayor Khalifa Sall, but not by Prime Minister Amadou Ba, the ruling party's candidate.

In response to the Constitutional Council's ruling, Sall called for a national dialogue to agree on a date to hold the election, adding that if agreement could not be achieved, he would ask the Constitutional Council to find his replacement when his term ended on 2 April. The national dialogue was attended by various civil, political and religious leaders, but was boycotted by almost all the presidential candidates. The outcome was an agreement to hold the election on 2 June. This was again rejected by the Constitutional Council, which called the election first for 31 March and later for 24 March, so as not to coincide with Holy Week. In this way, the candidates approved to run would have 17 days to campaign, instead of the 21 normally provided for by the electoral code. The Constitutional Council also ruled that the list of 19 approved candidates, which did not include opposition leader Sonko or Wade, could not be reviewed. With this decision, the electoral crisis in the country ended.

In an attempt to ease the political tension, Sall proposed a bill granting general amnesty to political protesters arrested since 2021 during the political crisis, which, according to some human rights groups, could number more than a thousand people. Among them was Sonko,

imprisoned since July for "incitement to insurrection" and unable to run in the presidential election. His party's substitute presidential candidate, Bassirou Diomaye Faye, was also in prison, but was authorised to run. The Senegalese Parliament passed the amnesty bill, 94 votes to 49. Critics said that the bill opens the door to impunity, since it includes the security forces responsible for the death of around 60 people during the protests. However, Sall's government argued that the amnesty would allow the country to emerge from its three-year political crisis. The ministry of justice said that a judge would have to decide who benefits from the law. A week after the law was passed, Ousmane Sonko and Bassirou Diomaye Faye were released from Camp Manuel prison in Dakar, causing thousands of people to take to the streets to celebrate.

As determined by the Constitutional Council, on 24 March, the presidential election was held in the country. Bassirou Diomaye Faye, Sonko's right-hand man, ran on behalf of the PASTEF party. The day was peaceful and had a high turnout. More than 7 million people were registered to vote in a country of approximately 17 million inhabitants. The results gave victory to Faye with 54.28% of the votes, thereby avoiding a runoff. His main rival, Amadou Ba, the candidate of the Benno Bokk Yakaar (BBY) coalition supported by outgoing President Sall, got 35.47% of the votes cast. The rest of the candidates did not receive more than 3%, reflecting the polarisation of the election. Ba and Sall admitted defeat, congratulated Faye and named him the winner. This is the fourth democratic transfer of power in Senegal since it gained independence from France over six decades ago.

In just 11 days, Faye went from being in prison to winning the election to be the youngest president in the history of Senegal at 44 years old. After being sworn in as president, he took his first action in office on 2 April by appointing Ousmane Sonko as prime minister, who announced that he would present Faye with a list of ministerial appointments for his approval.

The new government now faces major challenges, starting with overcoming the political crisis in the country and facing the deteriorated economic situation, with a high unemployment rate and a huge increase in immigration. Faye has promised to fight corruption, reform the economy and tighten Senegal's control over its natural resources by promoting national companies, renegotiating oil and gas contracts and introducing a new currency. In foreign policy, he has announced the reform of ECOWAS after the outbreak of various crises between the body and so many countries in the region: Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger (see the section on Western Sahel). However, Senegalese analysts argue that the lack of a majority in the Senegalese Parliament and the financial conditions imposed by the IMF could prevent him from implementing his platform. In fact, Faye had to backtrack on his promise to create a national currency, announcing that he will first seek to reform the CFA regional currency, shared between 14 West and Central African nations.

4.3. The peace process in southern Thailand resumes after a decade of authoritarianism

In southern Thailand, the negotiating delegations of the Thai government and the armed opposition group BRN met in Kuala Lumpur in February 2024 following a 12-month impasse in the peace process. In late February and early March, the technical teams met to finalise the commitments made by both sides and were expected to convene again in late April. Although no details were officially revealed about the agreements reached during the meeting, some indicated that both sides are negotiating and developing a road map (officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan toward Peace) focused mainly on two issues: reducing violence in the southern part of the country and conducting public consultations with significant and representative political, social and religious actors in the three southern Muslim-majority provinces (Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat) to address political solutions to the conflict and the substantive issues of the negotiations, such as the form of governance in southern Thailand and aspects related to identity, religion, education, the economic model and human rights. In late February, at the end of the seventh round of negotiations since the peace process began in 2013, facilitator Zulfiki Zainal Abidin, acting on behalf of the government of Malaysia, held a press conference with the heads of the government and the BRN's negotiating panels and said that the agreement between the parties indicated that significant progress had been made and was an important turning point in the peace process. Though many have identified major obstacles to the negotiating process and are sceptical about its future, several factors currently give us some reason to hold out hope for the resolution of a conflict that dates back to the early 20th century (specifically, the 1909 border agreement between the British Empire and what was then called the Kingdom of Siam, which included the three southern Muslim-majority provinces in the territory of what is now Thailand). Over 7,500 people have been killed and more than 14,000 have been wounded in the conflict since it broke out again in 2004.

Firstly, the round of negotiations in February not only broke the impasse in the process, but it was the first after almost a decade of Thai rule by the military junta (2014-2019) and the government that emerged from it (2019-2023). In fact, since the negotiating process began in 2013, shortly before the 2014 coup d'état that brought the military junta to power, practically the entire process has taken place under the direction of the Thai Armed Forces, so there are expectations that the first civilian government in a decade will take a different political approach to the negotiating process and the options for resolving the armed conflict politically. Illustrative in this regard, the BRN's chief negotiator, Anas Abdul Rahman, indicated in February that he expected to achieve a lasting peace with the new government of Srettha Tahvisin, who took office in September 2023 after long negotiations among the political parties following the May 2023 elections. Shortly thereafter, in November, the new government appointed Chatchai Bangchuad, the deputy secretary-general of the Council for National Security and the first civilian to hold the position, as head of the negotiating panel.

Secondly, the Malaysian government seems willing to play a more proactive role in facilitating dialogue between the government and the BRN. According to some observers, Malaysia has not only facilitated the negotiations since 2013, but has historically provided support to the Pattani nationalist movement and has hosted some historical leaders of the different insurgent groups that have operated in southern Thailand in recent decades, so Kuala Lumpur may have some influence over them. The inauguration of new Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim in November 2022 raised significant expectations, confirmed by his frequent visits to Thailand and direct appeals to both sides to advance a political solution that respects Thailand's territorial integrity while allowing the Pattani identity to survive by establishing some formula of autonomy or self-government in the southern part of the country. In line with the resumption of the negotiations sought by Kuala Lumpur, in January 2023 the Malaysian government appointed a new mediator, Zulfiki Zainal Abidin. Shortly thereafter, in February 2023, it announced that both parties agreed on the "Joint Comprehensive Plan toward Peace", a kind of shared road map to achieve a peace agreement towards the end of 2024. The facilitator of the negotiating process also revealed that the BRN would have accepted the participation of other armed groups operating in the south in the peace talks. Though not publicly specified later, the statement seemed to indicate the BRN's good will towards the negotiating process. Between 2013 and early 2019, the Thai government negotiated with MARA Patani, an umbrella organisation that brought together the different insurgent groups that had historically operated in the southern part of the country.

Thirdly, in early March 2024, a statement was made public for the first time by four experts in peace processes who have observed and supported the negotiations since 2019 at the request of both parties, both in their official format and in informal and exploratory talks between them. The four observers,

from Thailand, the United Kingdom, Germany and Norway, made the public statement to highlight the importance and significance of the commitments achieved and to appreciate the parties' determination to reach a political agreement through dialogue. Since the negotiating process began in 2013, both MARA Patani and later the BRN had demanded international support and observation of the process to provide it with greater credibility and guarantees. However, the Thai government had always been reluctant to accept any format to support the negotiations for fear that the conflict could become international. According to the International Crisis Group[18], after several years of exploratory contacts between the Thai government and the BRN sponsored by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, in November 2019, after the negotiations between Bangkok and MARA Patani had ended, both sides signed the Berlin Initiative, which establishes the framework and principles for direct negotiations between the Thai government and the BRN. In the next round of negotiations, held under a new negotiating format (April and May 2022), both parties agreed on the General Principles of the Peace Dialogue Process, in which they pledged to seek political solutions to the conflict in accordance with the will of the Pattani people and within the framework of the unitary state and the Constitution of Thailand. The parties' commitment gave rise to a series of formal and informal negotiations that led in early 2023 to the "Joint Comprehensive Plan toward Peace". Regarding its two main lines (the reduction of violence and the exploration of political options to resolve the conflict), some think that the new civilian government of Srettha Tahvisin is in a better position than the previous governments led by the military junta and its heirs to create the conditions necessary to consult with people and organisations with adequate representation and legitimacy in southern Thailand on possible proposals for governance and self-government, security, the economic model, education, culture and religion.

Other analysts view the future of the peace process more cautiously. Firstly, this is because the Thai Armed Forces have had a historically complex and tense relationship with the prime minister's party, Puea Thai, having carried out two coups against its leaders (one in 2004 against party leader Thaksin Shinawatra and another in 2014 against Yinluck Shinawatra, Thaksin's sister, who was the prime minister at the time). According to some analysts, parts of the Thai Armed Forces are opposed to resolving the conflict through dialogue and want to step up counterinsurgency operations. Martial law and a state of emergency imposed in 2004 still apply in most of the three Muslim-majority provinces

The resumption of the dialogue process in southern Thailand after almost a decade offers some positive perspectives for the resolution of the armed conflict through negotiations

and there are nearly 3,000 military checkpoints in the region. Some critics say that despite the civilian nature of the government and the fact that it is apparently the Council for National Security that leads the negotiating panel, operational decisions on the ground continue to be made by the Thai Army.

Along the same lines, some analysts think that, beyond the power of the Thai Army and its historically tense relationship with the current governing party, the civilian government has so far not shown unequivocal signs of political will or a solid commitment to the peace process. In fact, Puea Thai did not win the May 2023 elections and could only form a government after a three-month impasse and after gaining the support of parties and senators linked to the Thai Armed Forces. The election of the Thai government requires the joint vote of both chambers and the 250 senators are not elected democratically, but are appointed by the military junta. Furthermore, there have recently been many complaints about the human rights situation in the southern part of the country and about repression against activists and civil society organisations, which shrinks the civic space and consequently makes it less likely that civil society can participate actively in coordinating proposals to resolve the conflict (one of the key aspects of the negotiating process). In January 2024, for example, Human Rights Watch stated that the new government had not enacted human rights reforms and that the authorities continued to restrict fundamental rights, particularly freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Also in January, more than 30 human rights groups and NGOs from southern Thailand sent an open letter to the United Nations alleging that Thai state security forces harass civil society groups for holding public meetings. In June 2023, several security agencies filed charges against a group of student activists who carried out a mock referendum on self-determination at Prince of Songkla University, which provoked a strong reaction from various political parties and groups in Thai society.

Another aspect that provokes uncertainty about the negotiating process is the apparent internal split within the BRN between factions that want to prioritise the negotiations and consultations with civil society and factions that consider it unacceptable that the Thai government has limited the negotiations to the Thai Constitution and a unitary state and advocate continuing the armed struggle. For example, in late March 2024, in one of the largest coordinated attacks in recent years, 44 incidents of violence were reported in a single hour in the four southern provinces (including Songkhla), which local authorities blamed on armed groups rejecting the

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18. International Crisis Group, *Sustaining the Momentum in Southern's Thailand Peace Dialogue,* Briefing, Asia, 19 April 2022.

agreements reached in February and March. On previous occasions in recent years, significant episodes of violence also occurred after agreements were made between the parties. One aspect that had led to more impasse and blockage in the dialogue since 2013 has been the BRN's lack of will to curb the violence and the inability of the insurgent movement's political representatives to demonstrate to the government that they have control over the BRN's operational decisions on the ground.

In any case, for the first time in 20 years since the outbreak (or recrudescence) of the armed conflict in southern Thailand, some of the conditions necessary for finding a political solution to it seem to exist: the drastic drop in violence in recent years; the end of the period of authoritarianism led by the military junta and the expectation that the growing democratisation of the country will have an impact on the negotiations; a stable infrastructure for facilitating the dialogue (with Malaysian mediation and international support and observation); greater civil society participation in identifying grievances and proposing alternatives; an agreement between the parties on the principles, mechanisms and substantive agenda of the negotiations; and, ultimately, verification by the Thai government and the BRN that the armed struggle and counterinsurgency and militarisation operations in the southern part of the country have not been effective in achieving their political objectives (the eradication of the insurgency in southern Thailand and Pattani independence, respectively).

4.4. Cyprus: towards another failed opportunity or a chance to build bridges?

The dispute over the status of the divided island of Cyprus has decades of failed negotiations behind it. The conflict also continues to be interwoven in broader multidimensional sources of tension in the eastern Mediterranean regarding issues such as access to hydrocarbons and the delimitation of exclusive economic zones and maritime borders, pitting Greece and the Republic of Cyprus, on the one hand, against Türkiye and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), on the other, in more militarised regional and global contexts. In this complex scenario, modest opportunities are nevertheless coming together alongside the momentum generated by the UN Secretary-General's appointment of a personal envoy to explore whether there may be a basis for an agreement to break the impasse in finding a solution. However, there are major opposing factors as well. Different local, regional and international efforts are therefore required to create bases for rapprochement and build trust.

Inhabited by a Greek majority and a Turkish population and other minorities, and with a recent history of British colonialism (1878-1960) after three centuries under Ottoman rule, the island of Cyprus is staring down a long-term unresolved conflict. Preceded by paramilitary and intercommunity violence in the 1950s, Cyprus became independent in 1960, with a Constitution that established a bicommunal state, with power sharing between the two main communities of the island and quota-based representation. Thus, the Constitution ruled out two opposing visions on the island: the Greek Cypriot goal of union with Greece (*enosis*) and the Turkish Cypriot aim of partition of the island (*taksim*), protected by Türkiye. However, the conflict intensified after independence. Greek Cypriot action for a more unitary state and intercommunity violence led Turkish Cypriot representatives to leave the government in 1963, alleging a lack of security,[19] and causing the fragile architecture of the power sharing government to crumble. The UN deployed a peacekeeping mission (UNFICYP) in 1964, though the violence continued. A coup d'état carried out in 1974 to unite Cyprus with Greece, supported by the Greek military junta, triggered a military invasion of the island by Türkiye. The island was split between the northern third, under Turkish Cypriot control and with troops from Türkiye, and the two southern thirds, controlled by the Greek Cypriots and separated by a demilitarised buffer zone called the "Green Line", supervised by the UN. The different stages of violence had serious impacts on civilians in both communities, including killings, forced displacement, looting and sexual violence. The Turkish Cypriots and Türkiye accused the international community of serious bias for viewing the Republic of Cyprus, consisting of a Greek Cypriot government without Turkish Cypriot participation, as the only legitimate and internationally recognised administration. In 1983, the Turkish Cypriots proclaimed the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC).

Throughout the decades of division on the island, the leaders of both sides have participated in UN-supported negotiations, but without reaching agreements to resolve the conflict. The negotiations have focused on the solution of a bizonal and bicommunal federation for the island and recent moments of critical progress ultimately failed, such as the Annan Plan for reunification, supported by the Turkish Cypriot population but rejected by the Greek Cypriots in a referendum in 2004. Nevertheless, the Republic of Cyprus, meaning only the Greek Cypriot part, entered the EU that year, while the Turkish Cypriot part remained politically and economically isolated and dependent on Türkiye. More recently, the 2015-2017 negotiations did achieve some rapprochement and progress, but ultimately ended when no agreement was reached during the second international conference in Crans-Montana in July 2017. Furthermore, while the negotiations focused on issues such as governance and power sharing, property, territory, security, guarantees, the EU and the economy, other issues, such as the clarification of truth, memory and reconciliation, have been neglected over the decades.

Formal high-level negotiations have not resumed since 2017, with dialogue only conducted at lower levels. Notable difficulties include the gap between the parties' positions and the mutual lack of trust. Since the rise to power of Ersin Tatar in 2020, the Turkish Cypriot authorities have promoted a two-state solution, supported by Türkiye, which clashes with the solution of a bicommunal and bizonal federation sought by the Greek Cypriot authorities and still reflected in the United Nations framework for a solution. The Turkish Cypriot position holds that this model is outdated and asserts that there can be no solution without equality of sovereignty and equal international status. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has called for international recognition of the TRNC before the UN

Despite the great challenges in the long-running dispute in Cyprus, modest opportunities are coming together alongside the UN Secretary-General's appointment of a personal envoy

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19. International Crisis Group, *An Island Divided: Next Steps for Troubled Cyprus*, Europe Report no. 268, 17 April 2023.

General Assembly. Despite these new and profound difficulties owing to the magnitude of disagreement between both sides, some opportunities have emerged.

The first opportunity is the UN Secretary-General's appointment of former Colombian Foreign Minister María Ángela Holguín Cuéllar as his personal envoy for Cyprus, charged with using good offices to seek common ground on how to move forward on the Cypriot issue. The appointment itself demonstrated the achievement of an agreement between the parties, by overcoming recent disagreement about it.[20] Holguín Cuéllar is a diplomat with extensive experience, including as a plenipotentiary negotiator in the negotiating process between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrilla group (2015-2016), which ended with a peace agreement. Holguín Cuéllar's appointment comes after a few years without a figure at that level dedicated to the Cypriot dispute, reactivating and giving some impetus to the search for solutions. She does face restrictions, however, as according to the Turkish Cypriot authorities and Turkish government their condition is that her term of office be limited to six months.

Since assuming her new role, Holguín Cuéllar has taken an inclusive and participatory approach, consulting with a broad ecosystem of actors, including both sides' leaders, negotiators, members of the joint technical committees, political parties, mayors, chambers of commerce, journalists, religious leaders, think tanks and associations, including women's groups, international actors involved in the dispute and others. Her analysis stresses the experience of her team of advisors and attempts to transcend the binary framework of a federation solution versus a two-state solution and distinguish between a mutually beneficial peace and an unsustainable status.[21] In any case, it remains to be seen if the growing divide between the parties will widen into a gulf or if it may be possible to bridge it and resume the negotiating process. At the very least, Holguín Cuéllar's work may have helped to clarify in detail both sides' positions at this new stage, which is necessary to tone down the accusatory rhetoric and discover possible new ground for common understanding.

Even in scenarios in which negotiations cannot be restarted in the short term, the renewed push to explore common ground could facilitate minimal progress, such

Even in scenarios in which negotiations cannot be restarted in the short term, the renewed push to explore common ground could facilitate minimal progress, such as new confidence-building measures or cooperation in certain areas

as new confidence-building measures or cooperation in certain areas. In early 2024, Greek Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides announced new confidence-building measures that included granting citizenship to children with one Turkish Cypriot parent when the other parent is from Türkiye. However, his announcement was criticised by the Turkish Cypriot authorities, who viewed them as rights and not confidence-building measures. Tatar's references in 2024 to the need for specific action to end Turkish Cypriot isolation and his allusions to issues such as direct flights, direct trade and sports indicate the need and possible scope for new cooperation and confidence-building measures if there is the will and the possibility of dialogue and agreements in certain areas, though this is still uncertain.

Another possible opportunity lies in the rapprochement between Greece and Türkiye in 2023. Their dispute cuts across several different dimensions (the Cypriot issue, the delimitation of their maritime borders, their exclusive economic zones, their continental shelves and air space, their access to hydrocarbons and the disputed sovereignty of various islands) and in recent years has led to greater militarisation of the Eastern Mediterranean and serious moments of crisis, such as when two warships from Greece and Türkiye collided in 2020. The dispute has also been channelled through mechanisms of dialogue, though it has not always been easy. In 2023, both countries took steps towards rapprochement, which culminated in a meeting in Athens between Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the latter's first visit to Greece since 2017 as part of the Greece-Türkiye High-Level Cooperation Council (HLCC). Both signed a non-binding, 10-point declaration of "friendly relations and good neighbourliness" in which they committed, among other things, to resolve any dispute peacefully.[22] The rapprochement may contribute to more relaxed regional relations. It does have its limits, however, since no explicit mention was made of the Cypriot issue and it will not necessarily have an impact on the negotiations over Cyprus. Furthermore, the dynamic of militarisation underway in the region and on the island continues and it remains to be seen how this approach impacts human security in the region, since the agenda included areas of *securitization* of migration and displacement.

20. International Crisis Group, "How to Reinvigorate the UN's Mediation Efforts in Cyprus", *ICG Commentary*, 18 August 2023.
21. Kaymak, "Erol, Reviving Peace Talks in Cyprus: Diplomatic Innovation and the New UN Envoy", SWP Comment no. 7, *Centre for Applied Turkey Studies*, February 2024.
22. See the full text in the article by Kokkinidis, Tasos, "Full Text of the Friendship Declaration Between Greece, Turkey", *Greek Reporter*, 7 December 2023.
23. European Council, *European Council conclusions, 17 and 18 April 2024*, 2024.
24. Foreign Ministry of Türkiye, *Regarding the Conclusions of the Extraordinary European Council of 17-18 April 2024*, press release no. 63, 18 April 2024.

On the other hand, potentially promising was a certain recent relaxation in relations between the EU and Türkiye, which could have a positive impact on the Cypriot issue. However, this opportunity already seems to be fading. In the European Council's conclusions of April 2024, the EU makes the strengthening of EU-Türkiye cooperation conditional on the resumption and progress of the Cypriot dialogue process.[23] Türkiye categorically rejected the EU's strategy of linking the progress of EU-Türkiye relations to the Cypriot issue.[24] Since his election in 2023, the Greek Cypriot leader has called for a more active role for the EU in resolving the conflict, including via the creation of a special envoy, which the EU has ruled out for now. However, and in view of the European Council's conclusions of April 2024 and Ankara's reactions, it remains to be seen whether the EU will contribute to intra-Cypriot confidence-building and cooperation or whether confrontational dynamics between Türkiye and the EU will prevail.

Finally, civil society actors on the island, including women's organisations, continue to push for dialogue and to promote and participate in intercommunity initiatives. The negotiating process also has complementary tracks, such as dialogue between political parties (supported by Slovakia) and between religious actors (backed by Sweden). However, the ability of pro-dialogue civil society to influence leadership was limited. There is also a legacy of decades of separation between the populations and a limited approach to truth, memory and reconciliation. Other current problems include the growing pressure of climate change on the island, the increase in inequality and rising vulnerability and violence on the island against the growing migrant and asylum-seeking population, which bring other challenges and needs, but also other paths of potential cooperation.

Altogether, some modest opportunities are coming together in the current context, but they are limited and heavily offset by factors that dim the prospects of finding common ground to resume the negotiations in a way that could result in an agreement.

4.5. The Summit of the Future and the United Nations New Agenda for Peace: an opportunity to strengthen multilateralism

The early 2020s have witnessed major global crises, with doubts raised about the global multilateral system. The rise of authoritarianism and the decline in gender equality in many countries, the worsening of the climate crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the genocide in Gaza, combined with three dozen armed conflicts and exponential growth in military spending, are symptoms of these international crises. Meanwhile, compliance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 is seriously compromised by the lack of sustained progress. For example, in its latest report on the progress of the SDGs, the United Nations predicts that if current trends continue, 575 million people will still be in extreme poverty in 2030. The global hunger situation is worse than at any time since 2005 and if the same trend continues, it will take 286 years to close the gender gaps related to discriminatory laws. Furthermore, if we stay the current course, 84 million boys and girls will still be out of school in 2030.[25] However, the Summit of the Future is scheduled to be held in 2024. Convened by the UN Secretary-General, the Summit aims to promote multilateralism and global governance to respond to these global crises. It also gives impetus to achieving the SDGs, which hang in doubt because of the limited progress made.

The multilateral system is being put to the test by different governments and global actors, at times with flagrant breaches of international law and International Humanitarian Law. The most recent example is the Israeli military campaign in Gaza, which many different lawyers and human rights organisations consider genocide and has been brought before the International Court of Justice for this reason. Given these global crises, the UN Secretary-General proposes the Pact for the Future, a document that presents an opportunity to give fresh impetus to multilateralism. This proposal for an international agenda should be endorsed by the countries at the September 2024 Summit. It is based on his report *Our Common Agenda*, which proposed 12 commitments to face the challenges of the coming years. These commitments had previously been established to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations in 2020 and include protecting the environment, promoting peace and preventing conflicts, guaranteeing justice and international law, improving digital cooperation, modernising the United Nations, prioritising women and girls and including youth. More specifically, the Pact for the Future will cover five themes: sustainable development and funding for development; international peace and security; science, technology and innovation

and digital cooperation; youth and future generations; and the transformation of global governance.

The Secretary-General's proposal for a new peace agenda identifies some of the most important global challenges in terms of peace and security and suggests action to take in five areas. Some of this action addresses peace and security issues that have recently become more important in the aforementioned global crisis, such as the elimination of nuclear weapons and the promotion of preventive diplomacy, which the Secretary-General links to stark geopolitical divisions. He also places great emphasis on strengthening tools of prevention and enhances the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as a matter of peace and security, as it should address the root causes of violence and insecurity. He also raises issues such as the interrelationships between climate, peace and security and the need to rethink peacekeeping operations.

In recent years, feminist peacebuilding and the women, peace and security agenda have been weakened by the lack of progress and government commitment and by the march of political movements and misogynistic governments that question fundamental women's rights. The United Nations New Peace Agenda could be a good platform for boosting the active and significant participation of women and civil society in international peacebuilding. This agenda is clearly committed to dismantling patriarchal power structures and promoting women's full, equal and meaningful participation at all levels of decision-making on peace and security issues. It also identifies some threats to peace that are clearly significant for women and civil society in general, such as violence that does not take place in contexts of armed conflict, the shrinking of space for participating in civil society and the climate emergency. In addition, it is committed to global solutions that address the root causes of violence rather than prioritising security responses.

In line with the international questioning of the multilateral system, institutions responsible for promoting women's rights have also been challenged and criticised in an attempt to halt the progress made in equality and the recognition of rights in recent decades and as part of global strategies to undermine the legitimacy of the United Nations. At the same time, the global feminist movement has become more powerful in the last decade, with its discourse permeating a good part of public opinion worldwide, marking important milestones and mobilising hundreds of thousands of women on crosscutting issues such as the recognition

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25. United Nations, *Informe de los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible 2023: Edición especial. Por un plan de rescate para las personas y el planeta*, United Nations, 2023.

of sexual and reproductive rights, especially the right to abortion, the fight against gender violence, the defence and promotion of the rights of LGTBIQ+ people and the participation of women and feminist agendas in peacebuilding. Thus, different governments have described their foreign policies as feminist, which still receive criticism from civil society due to their lack of ambition, but also demonstrate feminism's ability to influence issues on the international agenda. There is opportunity in this tension between the rise of political movements opposed to the multilateral order and defenders of patriarchal and misogynistic systems and the strength of the feminist movement and the growing institutionalisation of feminist policies. In this regard, the framework developed by the UN Secretary-General supports a more inclusive and transformative approach.

The New Agenda for Peace and the Pact for the Future have drawn some fire for not being ambitious enough about tackling the climate crisis, currently one of the main threats to human security. Critics say that their rather rhetorical and repetitive commitments fall short of profoundly transforming the international economic and military system in a way that could reverse the increasingly serious effects of climate change. A more specific commitment to the rights of women and girls and gender equality is also needed, as they remain relatively invisible through a crosscutting approach. Criticism of the main shortcomings of this new agenda must be addressed to make the Pact for the Future truly transformative, addressing in detail the causes of the global crises that threaten the wellbeing of most of the world's population and that could get even worse if the aforementioned trends continue.

However, the Summit of the Future can serve as an international catalyst in turbulent political times if the Secretary-General can gather enough support from governments that wish to intensify their commitment to the multilateral system, addressing pending transformations and strengthening necessary commitments to peace and human rights.

5. Risk scenarios

Drawing on the analysis of the armed conflicts and socio-political crises around the world in 2023,[1] in this chapter the UAB's School for a Culture of Peace identifies five contexts that may worsen and become sources of greater instability and violence in 2024 or even further into the future due to their conditions and dynamics. The risk scenarios refer to the threat of a new direct confrontation between the DRC and Rwanda when 30 years have passed since the Rwandan genocide of 1994, events that marked African and world history and became one of the most important failures of the international community; the risk of the armed conflict in Sudan becoming chronic and a contagion effect in the region with serious consequences; the increase in political and military tension between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea; the serious militarization in Europe derived from the deterioration of conflict and the setbacks in the negotiating sphere in the region, as a consequence of the invasion and war in Ukraine and the confrontation between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic actors; and finally, to the erosion of international humanitarian law in Gaza and the future of the global order as a consequence.

Map 5.1. **Risk scenarios**
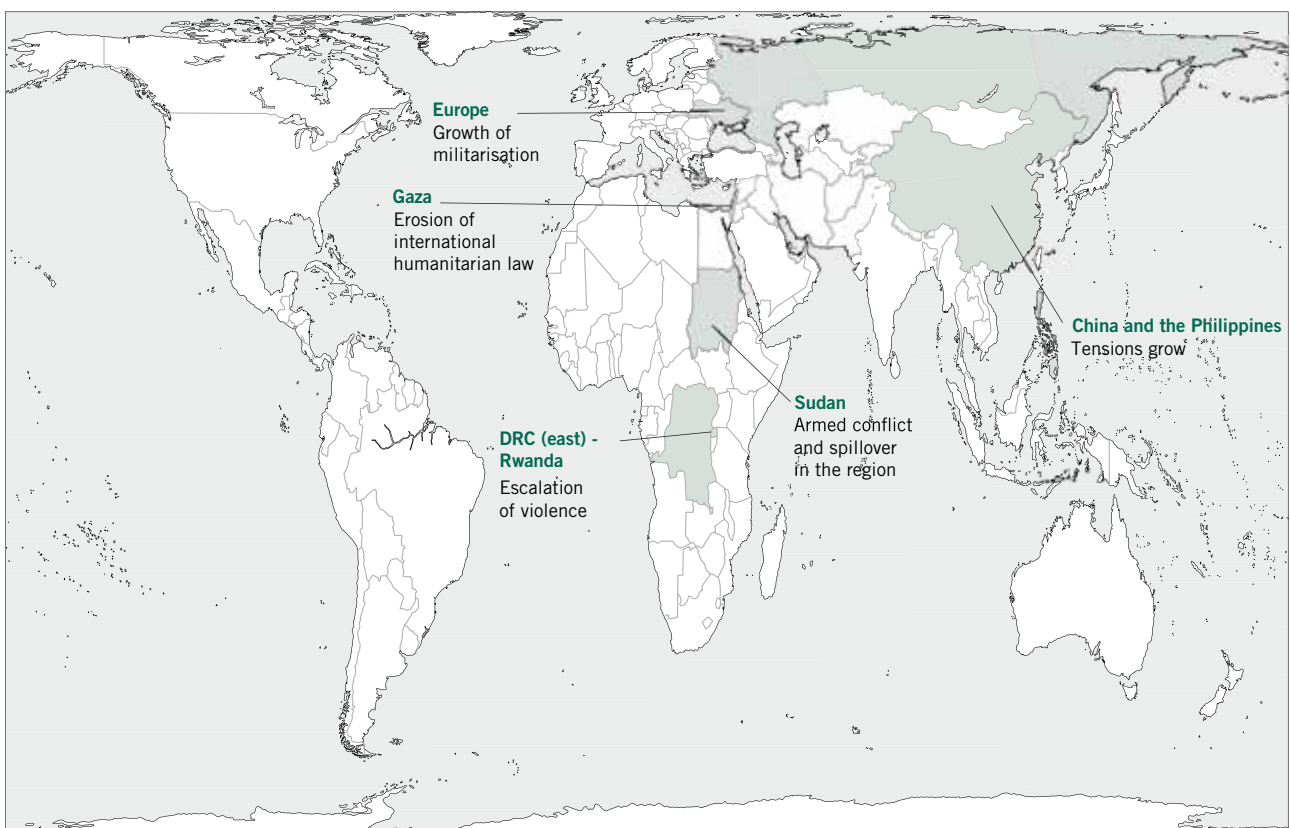
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1. The analysis of each context is based on the yearly review of the events that occurred in 2023 and includes some important factors and dynamics of the first four months of 2024.

5.1. Rwanda: never again?

Thirty years after the Rwandan genocide of 1994, which marked African and world history and was one of the international community's greatest failures to fulfil its responsibility to guarantee peace and international security, another episode has broken out in the war rocking the Great Lakes region, pitting the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) against Rwanda through its local ally, currently known as the insurgent group March 23 Movement (M23). The situation could even lead to a direct open conflict between both countries, as happened previously in 1996 and 1998.[2]

For just over 100 days, between 7 April and 15 July 1994, around 800,000 people, most of them members of the minority Tutsi community and also moderate parts of the majority Hutu community who were opposed to the regime, were murdered in a planned, state-sponsored genocide carried out by the Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR), the Interahamwe militias ("those who work together" in Kinyarwanda, originally the youth wing of the ruling party, the MRND) and also thousands of civilians who joined in the killing, organised by the most extremist parts of the government, called Hutu Power. The UN abandoned the country despite the warnings and ongoing atrocities. In addition to the death toll, around 250,000 women were raped. Current President Paul Kagame was leading the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) rebellion from Uganda at the time and overthrew the genocidal regime in 1994. Kagame, who undertook the physical and psychological reconstruction of the country, became a successful leader in the fight against poverty, which has won support and aid from the international community. In the last 30 years, he has managed to build an image of a strong leader and good manager while a fog of guilt hangs over the international community for not having intervened to end the genocide.

These two issues—the image of Kagame as a strong leader and good manager and the fog of guilt—have helped to diminish and even justify the crimes he committed as the head of the RPF to overthrow the genocidal government. According to analysts, these crimes claimed thousands of lives and have never been investigated. Without openly acknowledging it,

The image of Paul Kagame as a strong leader and good manager and the fog of guilt over the international community for not having intervened to end the genocide have contibuted to justify the crimes committed by the Rwandan president and the authoritarianism of his regime

the international community rationalised that a strong leader was needed due to the terrible circumstances that the country had experienced, so it helped Rwanda to establish an authoritarian regime that repressed and violated the human rights of its own population to prevent any possible repetition of the events. Thirty years later, however, this argument could help to overturn the situation. The justice and reconciliation process carried out[3] will reveal its results in the coming years because the prison sentences of some of the perpetrators of the genocide are coming to an end. This means that around 30,000 people will be released in the coming years, posing an important challenge for intercommunity reconciliation and for managing underlying tension. The genocide's multidimensional impacts are observable in the country's collective imagination. They have marked Rwanda during these last 30 years and will continue to do so indefinitely.[4]

President Kagame has governed in an authoritarian manner, establishing an atmosphere of persecution and repression of political dissent, arguing that the political and social opposition promotes a genocidal discourse. He has eliminated and silenced his adversaries inside and outside the country.[5] Human rights organisations have often demonstrated that the government of Rwanda violates the rights of those who dare to challenge or contradict its narrative. In addition to the 250,000 Rwandan refugees and the armed groups responsible for the genocide, which operate in the eastern DRC, more Rwandan refugees are scattered throughout neighbouring Burundi, Tanzania and Uganda. The aforementioned armed groups in the eastern DRC are the former FAR and the Interahamwe militias, which created the Army for the Liberation of Rwanda after 1994 (ALiR I and II). In 2000, ALiR I and II were merged with the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), which includes a formal armed wing (FOCA) and splinter groups, the main ones being CNRD-Ubwiyunge and RUD-Urunana. There are also Rwandan political groups opposed to the ruling party in Rwanda that demand to return safely voluntarily to their homeland to exercise their political rights with no restrictions, as well as the Rwandan diaspora in Europe, the Americas and Africa. Rwanda has set the region's political and military

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2. See Royo, Josep Maria, Grandes Lagos: ¿a las puertas de una tercera guerra congolesa?, *Africaye*, 13 June 2023.
3. See Royo, Josep Maria, "Never again" turns 30 in Rwanda, *Nationalia,* 5 April 2024. The justice and reconciliation process undertaken by Rwanda combined a judicial response at three levels, given the enormity of the crimes committed: the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, the national judicial system and the traditional community justice system, known as the gacaca courts, which brought more than a million people to justice, including many of those primarily responsible for the genocide.
4. Xinhua, "Remains of over 100 victims of genocide in Rwanda retrieved from mass graves", 25 January 2024. For more information, see Ibuka [online].
5. Human Rights Watch, "'Join Us or Die'. Rwanda's Extraterritorial Repression", 10 October 2023.

agenda in defence of its national interests, which directly affect its neighbour, the DRC. It has intervened in Congolese affairs under the argument that the DRC does not protect the population of Rwandan origin there and that it continues to shelter those responsible for the genocide, the FDLR, which have also been used by successive Congolese governments to restrict Rwanda. Relations between Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and the DRC have been permanently strained by accusations that they support rebel groups that seek to overthrow the Rwandan government. In turn, Rwanda mobilises and arms the Rwandan population in the eastern DRC. Since 2001, Rwanda, Uganda and dozens of companies around the world have been blamed by the UN for having participated directly or indirectly in plundering Congolese natural resources in a "systematic and systemic way". Rwanda has also been accused of having armed and organised rebellions to protect the Rwandan Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge communities in the provinces of North and South Kivu and of pursuing its own interests there. Despite all this, Rwanda has escaped sanctions by the UN and the rest of the international community.[6]

The last episode began in 2022, when there was fighting between the security forces of Rwanda and the DRC in the border area. Supported by evidence from the United Nations, Rwanda was accused of providing military and logistical support for the offensive of the armed group M23 in North Kivu, and even of participating directly in combat alongside the M23. The M23 is Rwanda's main proxy armed group within the DRC, which fights for the rights of the Rwandan population in the Congo under different names (RCD-Goma during the "Africa World War" in the 1990s, Laurent Nkunda's CNDP between 2006 and 2009 and the M23 since 2012). Under Rwandan protection, the M23 helps to plunder Congolese natural resources both for its own and for Rwanda's benefit. In recent months, the situation has worsened to the point that a new conflict could erupt between the two countries.

Despite the legacy weighing on Rwanda and its open wounds, a deeper analysis is essential to understand and resolve the local, regional and international dynamics at the root of the conflict between both countries. Rwanda commemorates *Kwibuka* 30 in 2024.[7] Yet remembering, which is what *kwibuka* means in Kinyarwanda, should not include rewriting history to justify current policy, which obscures part of the victims of the genocide, the Hutus executed by Hutu Power, and many others who were murdered by the Kagame government in the years after 1994 when a regime that restricts freedoms was established. Thirty years on, despite the enormous difficulties and challenges entailed, not enough work has been done to achieve true reconciliation within Rwandan society, including the diaspora and the population in exile, and to exorcise the demons of 1994.

The current regional efforts of the EAC and the AU have so far failed.[8] The initiatives that Angola continues to promote,[9] under the mandate of the AU, require support and pressure from the international community to achieve effective negotiation and avoid any escalation of the situation when the M23 stands at the gates of Goma, the capital of North Kivu. To pacify this situation, the international community must address Rwanda's legitimate right to security in a way that enforces a political dialogue with the FDLR and other political groups opposed to the government and includes their disarmament, fair trial and voluntary return from the DRC. It must also defend the legitimate right to security of the Rwandan communities living in the DRC and the full recognition of their citizenship, in addition to the DRC's legitimate right to peace and security and the inviolability of its borders. The M23's conquest of Goma would be a disaster with unpredictable consequences.

6. UN Security Council, *Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Annex of the Letter from the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council*, (S/2001/357), 12 April 2021.
7. Kigali Genocide Memorial, Kwibuka 30, 7 April 2024.
8. See the summary on the DRC in chapter 2 (Peace negotiations in Africa) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios,* Barcelona: Icaria, 2023, and Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios,* Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.
9. Oyinloye, Afolake, "Rwanda's President agrees to meet Felix Tshisekedi over eastern Congo crisis", *Africanews*, 12 March 2024.

5.2. Sudan: faced with the risk of chronic armed conflict and of spillover in the region with disastrous consequences

The latest war in Sudan passed the one-year mark on 15 April. This conflict pits the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by the chair of the Transitional Sovereign Council, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, against the paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces (RSF), commanded by the vice chair of the Council, Lieutenant General Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, popularly known as "Hemedti". Although initially the conflict mainly affected Khartoum, the violence transformed over time, expanding to almost the entire country and becoming a national civil war. This year, the violence has been devastating, claiming the lives of more than 15,550 people.[10] It has forcibly displaced 8.6 million people (1.8 million of which have taken refuge in neighbouring countries, making it the worst forced displacement crisis in the world, according to UNHCR).[11] Twenty-five million people, over half the Sudanese population, require humanitarian assistance, with high rates of famine, while aid continues to be blocked by the parties.[12] After a year of war, the prospects are dim for containing the violence and returning to the negotiations of 2022 to achieve a peaceful transition in the country, while the risk grows that the Sudanese crisis will affect other neighbouring states. There are different reasons for this. First, various actors are becoming more involved in the dispute, which makes it harder to resolve. Second, the different attempts at negotiations have failed, as they have overlapped without achieving any significant progress to date. Finally, the instability and violence suffered by most neighbouring countries, with armed conflicts in Egypt, Libya, Chad, the CAR, South Sudan and Ethiopia, may be aggravated by spillover from the war in Sudan, thereby amplifying the regional crisis.

At the start of the armed conflict between the SAF and the RSF, the armed movements of Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, including the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), the Sudan People's Liberation Army Minni Minawi faction (SLA-MM) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) Malik Agar faction, some of which had signed the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement, declared their opposition to the war and their neutrality. However, with the passage of time and as the war spread to their states, they took part in the hostilities. As the war has spread to the eastern part of the country, to the states of Red Sea, Kassala and

Gedarif, new actors have emerged, such as the Eastern Sudan Liberation Forces, the United Popular Front for Liberation and Justice, the Beja National Congress and the Beja Armed Congress, which have allied with one of the parties. Defeated Islamist groups from the al-Bashir era have also raised militias in the states of Nile River, Northern and Kassala to fight alongside the SAF. All these actors make the conflict more complex. As new armed groups and militias emerge, they will not only escalate the hostilities, but also make to harder to end the war and rebuild the country. Moreover, these actors' growing involvement is causing the war to increasingly take on an interethnic dimension, with hate speech that uses identity as a political tool. Especially critical is the aggravation of intercommunity tensions across the Darfur region, especially between Rizeigat Arab groups (the origin of most RSF troops) and non-Arab Masalit groups, threatening to expand the conflict along ethnic lines. Divisions have also appeared among Darfuri armed groups that could spark a conflict between factions that have declared allegiance to the RSF and others that have declared allegiance to the SAF.

Since the conflict broke out in April 2023, various regional and international actors have launched different mediation initiatives to force the parties to end the hostilities and return to the negotiating table

Since the conflict broke out in April 2023, various regional and international actors have launched different mediation initiatives to force the parties to end the hostilities and return to the negotiating table. Yet despite the AU's initial attempts to ensure a coordinated mediation process, they overlapped without coordination or tangible results. The two most notable mediation initiatives are led by the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) and by the US and Saudi Arabia, although the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Egypt also promoted their own initiatives. The negotiating rounds in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia) have been the most significant, but even there the military leaders of both parties have not met face to face.[13] Although some actors have re-energised their diplomacy by appointing new envoys (UN, USA, AU, IGAD), the main obstacles to progress in the negotiations are still the lack of coordination between the different mediation initiatives, the parties' inability to agree on the conditions to achieve a ceasefire and their disagreement on the post-conflict transitional process. Particularly, the subject of the integration of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), the RSF and the various armed groups in a future unified Sudanese Army, which originally triggered the war, remains a delicate issue.

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10. ACLED, *One Year of War in Sudan, Situation Update*, 15 April 2024.
11. UNHCR, Operational Data Program, Sudan Situation. [Viewed on 17 April 2024]
12. OCHA, Sudan Situation Report, Last updated: 15 Apr 2024. [Viewed on 17 April 2024]
13. See the case of Sudan in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

Other thorny problems include the issues left pending in the negotiations agreed in late 2022, such as the review of the Juba Peace Agreement (2020), which the armed groups that signed it oppose, the dismantling of Omar al-Bashir's regime, which has played a significant role in supporting the SAF in the current crisis, and the crisis in eastern Sudan.

The war is not merely undermining hopes for a peaceful and democratic transition in Sudan. Over time, it poses a significant threat to regional stability as it could possibly spill over into bordering countries with their own dynamics of instability and violence. The Sudanese conflict is already having effects on Chad because many RSF fighters come from that country. It also significantly threatens South Sudan, which is undergoing a delicate transition plagued by violence and has scheduled its presidential election for December 2024. Particularly worrying is South Sudan's great dependence on Sudan to sell its oil, which passes through Sudanese pipelines. If these pipelines are blocked, as happened in February 2024, it could have a significant impact on the national economy and bring it to collapse, destabilising the country and overturning the transition on which South Sudan has been working in recent years. In neighbouring Ethiopia, the violence in Sudan could have repercussions for the delicate peace processes in Tigray and Oromia. Finally, various analysts have asserted that if the war becomes chronic in Sudan, the vacuum in governance could attract new external actors, including jihadist actors or neighbouring countries, due to Sudan's strategic position in the Red Sea.[14]

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14. International Crisis Group, "Sudan: A Year of War", 11 April 2024.

5.3. Political and military tensions grow between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea

Since mid-2022, and especially in 2023 and the first few months of 2024, there has been a significant escalation of political and military tension between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea, specifically in relation to two land formations located in the exclusive economic zone of the Philippines (200 nautical miles from the Philippine coast, in what Manila calls the West Philippine Sea) that Beijing claims as its own, as they fall within the "ten-dash line", a region covering approximately 90% of the South China Sea. Even though Chinese leader Xi Jinping and Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos met directly twice in 2023 and pledged to try to reduce the tension between their countries, and despite the fact that both governments have held several military meetings to prevent collisions in the disputed regions, many analysts have warned of the risk that the countries could escalate to war, possibly involving the United States. Some media outlets argue that relations between the governments of the Philippines and China in the South China Sea (and particularly in the West Philippine Sea) gradually became strained after the election of Ferdinand Marcos in May 2022 due to his wish to strategically reorient Philippine foreign policy in the region compared to the previous administration of Rodrigo Duterte. According to these analysts, Duterte attempted to minimise disputes with China to cultivate a better economic and strategic relationship with Beijing and diversify strategic partnerships in the region, resulting in a departure from the traditional alliance with the United States. According to some, Manila's new approach includes modernising the Philippine Armed Forces to face the country's challenges in the South China Sea, strengthening military and defence cooperation with the United States and intensifying strategic rapprochement with countries in the region that have territorial disputes with China, accelerating the discussion within ASEAN of the code of conduct in the South China Sea to avoid incidents and escalations of tension, criticising and confronting the aggressive and dangerous behaviour of Chinese ships in the West Philippine Sea and appealing to freedom of navigation and the resolution of disputes in accordance with international law.

The first way in which political and military tension between both countries has grown explicitly is in the unprecedented rise in the number of naval incidents, especially in Scarborough Shoal, which was occupied by the Philippines until a naval confrontation lasting several months in 2012 caused it to come under China's effective control, and especially in Second Thomas Shoal (also known as Ayungin in Tagalog and Renai in Chinese), located in the Spratly Islands, an archipelago whose sovereignty is claimed in full or in part by six countries. Second Thomas Shoal is about 100 nautical miles from the island of Palawan (Philippines) and 620 from China,

but only about 20 miles from Mischief Reef, controlled and militarised by Beijing. In 2023 and 2024, there were serious incidents between Chinese Coast Guard ships and Philippine vessels on a mission to resupply a Second World War ship stranded on Second Thomas Shoal since 1999 to guarantee its control. Such serious incidents, especially in February, October and December 2023 and also in early and late March 2024, included collisions between ships, which disabled them; Chinese ships' use of a military-grade laser, which some media outlets depicted as hostile because it can precede the firing of projectiles; and Beijing's use of water cannons, which have even injured some Filipino crew members and which some experts claim can sink vessels and cause serious harm and even death to crews. In some of these incidents, Manila raised diplomatic protests and summoned representatives of the Chinese government in the Philippines for consultations.

Another source of increasing tension in the region was China's publication in August 2023 of an updated map of the country that included territorial claims contested by other countries on the western border with India, the South China Sea and Taiwan. The new "ten-dash line," which covers 90% of the South China Sea, includes the entire island of Taiwan (the tenth dash), as well as several small islands and islets claimed by Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Indonesia. Manila said that the publication of the map was intended to legitimise China's alleged sovereignty and jurisdiction over maritime and territorial areas of the Philippines and that its position had no basis in international law or in the 2016 ruling by an arbitration court of the United Nations National Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The court ruled that there was no legal basis for China's territorial claims within the "ten-dash line", noted that Beijing had violated the Philippines' sovereign rights over its exclusive economic zone and declared that the disputed geography of the Spratly Islands does not compose an exclusive economic zone, as Beijing argues. However, neither China nor Taiwan recognised the validity of the ruling, asserting that territorial disputes are not subject to the UNCLOS and should be resolved through bilateral negotiations. In January 2024, the head of the Philippine Armed Forces announced his intention to develop the nine islands and other geological formations that the Philippines occupies in the South China Sea, which are dependent on regular resupply missions and highly vulnerable to blockade by Chinese ships. These include Thitu Island (known in Manila as Pag-asa), the largest island occupied by the Philippines in the South China Sea, which has an airstrip and a pier and is home to a population of around 200 people, and Second Thomas Shoal, where Manila plans to set up a desalination plant to reduce the number of resupply missions for the soldiers living on

the stranded ship. However, the Philippine government denied that it would fortify or militarise Second Thomas Shoal, which Beijing has repeatedly called a red line. Beijing maintains that former President Joseph Estrada promised to remove the ship when he was in office, though Manila denies it.

The third cause for international concern in the dispute between both countries has been Washington's greater assertiveness regarding its military obligations towards the Philippines, the strengthening of security and defence ties between both countries, the Philippines' rapprochement with countries in the region critical of China's behaviour and the notable boost in military spending to modernise the Philippines' ability to wage war. On 11 April, during a presidential summit in Washington between the US, Japan and the Philippines to boost cooperation in security and defence, US President Joe Biden once again publicly declared that the US-Philippines Mutual Defence Treaty of 1951 obliges the US to defend the Philippines in the event of armed attack against the Philippine Armed Forces, aircraft or public vessels, including those of the Philippine Coast Guard, anywhere in the South China Sea. Washington has repeatedly expressed concern about China's aggressive behaviour. In October 2023, the Pentagon reported that there had been more than 180 dangerous aerial incidents between US and Chinese military aircraft in the South China Sea and the East China Sea since 2021, more than in the two previous decades. The Philippines and other countries have also repeatedly claimed that China uses maritime and aerial intimidation and de facto occupation and subsequent militarisation of islands and other geological formations to alter the status quo in its territorial disputes in the region. Thus, Manila significantly enhanced its cooperation with several countries that have territorial disputes with China, including India, Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia, and especially with South Korea, Australia (which in November 2023 conducted joint maritime and air patrols in the South China Sea for the first time) and Japan, with whom negotiations began for a Reciprocal Access Agreement to accommodate visiting military forces and conduct joint military activities.

Regardless, what most worried the Chinese government was the strengthening of the military alliance between the Philippines and the United States. In April 2023, the United States and the Philippines conducted the largest joint military exercise to date, involving over 17,000 troops, and in November 2023 and January 2024, they carried out joint patrols from the Taiwan Strait to the South China Sea. In February 2023, the US and the Philippines also announced a deal to expand their Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement to give US military forces access to four additional military facilities in the Philippines, three of which are in the north, facing Taiwan, and the other near the Spratly Islands. Although Marcos said the new bases were purely defensive and should be of no concern to anyone who refrains from attacking the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country, several analysts considered it one of the most important agreements in recent times in the relations between the US and the Philippines. Beijing warned that the agreement will seriously harm Philippine national interests and endanger regional peace and stability. In May 2023, both countries announced the renewal of the new guidelines of the 1951 Mutual Defence Treaty to explain that the defence provisions of the treaty would be activated in the event of any attack in the South China Sea and to strengthen joint capabilities in the face of grey zone tactics (acts of coercion and intimidation that are not normally considered acts of war), a scenario of multidimensional threats (land, sea, air, space and cyberspace) and various forms of asymmetric, hybrid and irregular warfare.

What most worried the Chinese government was the strengthening of the military alliance between the Philippines and the United States

Given the clear rise in tension between both countries, in December 2023 Ferdinand Marcos declared that China's foreign policy in the South China Sea was aggressive and did not respect the sovereignty of the Philippines or international law, adding that the management of the political and diplomatic dispute was yielding few results and advocating for what he called a "paradigm shift" in the South China Sea. Two days later, China's foreign minister accused the Philippines of repeatedly invading its territory, said relations between the two countries were at a crossroads and warned Manila that any miscalculation in their dispute in the South China Sea China would bring a determined reaction from Beijing, though without detailing the type of action that would be taken.

5.4. The growth of militarisation in Europe

The situation of armed conflict is worsening in Europe, including setbacks in prospects for resolving conflicts and tension through dialogue. The invasion and war in Ukraine have gone on for over two years now, with serious impacts on human and environmental security and no prospects for a short-term resolution. Meanwhile, the war and the confrontation between Russia and Euro-Atlantic actors are prompting serious militarisation in Europe and negatively influencing various conflicts and negotiating processes there, such as in Moldova. They are also having many other repercussions for international peace and security, such as the growth of militarisation around the world, and not only in Europe, a crisis in multilateral peacebuilding efforts, humanitarian impacts and others. Peace negotiations and efforts to support dialogue and mediation are on the retreat in Europe, while militarisation and bellicose rhetoric that devalues efforts and initiatives to promote dialogue, negotiations and peacebuilding are on the rise. Below are some of the risk scenarios in Europe with intertwined dynamics that highlight the need for multi-level efforts to de-escalate the war in Ukraine, promote a negotiated resolution to the conflict and reverse the serious dynamics of militarisation of the continent.

Firstly, Russia's war against Ukraine shows no signs of ending. This high-intensity armed conflict, one of the 17 in the world in 2023, has claimed tens of thousands of lives, mainly of members of the military. In addition, 14.5 million people in Ukraine needed humanitarian aid, 5.9 million people were refugees in Europe and 3.4 million remained internally displaced within Ukraine, according to data from April 2024.[15] The consistent high-intensity hostilities may escalate further, with a new Russian offensive launched in 2024, alongside the persistent risks of territorial expansion and nuclear escalation, which have thus far been contained. Meanwhile, diplomacy remains at a standstill, with no apparent prospects for movement in the parties' political positions that could indicate any short-term possibility of exploring new paths of negotiation. Since talks ended in March-April 2022, Russia has expressed its demand for recognition of the "new territorial reality" as a requirement for new negotiations or for the end of hostilities. This "new reality" refers to the areas taken and militarily occupied in four provinces of Ukraine. Unlike in the 2022 talks, when Kyiv considered the possibility of compartmentalising and postponing some issues, such as Crimea and neutral status for Ukraine, the public position since has been to demand the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine's internationally recognised borders as a precondition for any negotiations. In the meantime, Ukraine has also

been promoting its "Peace Formula" with allied actors. Part of the formula focuses on the Euro-Atlantic security architecture and massive transfer of military support to Ukraine, in contrast to approaches that could address continental security architectures and promote future continental commitments to shared security.

Western international actors seem to have neglected the search for political and negotiated solutions to the conflict and have instead focused much of their attention on military aspects, with massive transfers of military aid, weapons and training, though also financial and humanitarian assistance. In 2023, various actors, mainly from outside the West, intensified contacts with the parties, with proposals, meetings, documents and calls for dialogue, but they had no immediate effect. One positive development is the international peace conference that Switzerland will host in June 2024. Although Russia had not yet planned to participate by May 2024, the Swiss government has repeatedly stressed the importance of Moscow's involvement in the peace process. Swiss promotion of this conference and other efforts may help to lay the ground for rapprochement and negotiations. Along with Switzerland, China has also called for negotiations and taken some action, such as by meeting with the parties, developing its own position on resolving the conflict and designating a special envoy. It remains to be seen if these international efforts make any headway and whether more actors push in the direction of negotiated resolutions. Without greater political and diplomatic efforts and resources, there is a risk of addressing the conflict exclusively in military terms, prosecuting a war with serious multidimensional impacts and entrenching the current course of militarisation in Europe stemming from it.

Alongside the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the various responses to it, there is another risk scenario or worrying trend, that of militarisation in Europe. According to data gathered by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), military spending in Europe totalled 588 billion USD in 2023, which was 16% more than in 2022 and 62% more since 2014, when the internationalised internal conflict in eastern Ukraine began.[16] Russia spent 109 billion USD on its military, 24% more than in 2022 and 57% more than in 2014. In 2023, military expenditure accounted for 5.9% of the GDP and 16% of all public spending. The SIPRI notes that these are the highest levels of Russian military spending since the dissolution of the USSR and expects them to continue to rise. Ukraine spent 64.8 billion USD in 2023 (51% more than in 2022 and 1,272% more than in 2014). As

15. OCHA, "Ukraine. Situation report", *OCHA*, 18 April 2024.
16. Tian, Nan, Diego Lopes da Silva, Xiao Liang and Lorenzo Scarazzato, *Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2023*. SIPRI Factsheet, April 2024.

the Centre Delàs has indicated based on this SIPRI data, the countries bordering Russia increased their military expenditure the most, with Poland spending 75% more in 2023 than in 2022 and with Finland's military budget rising by 51%.[17] Furthermore, NATO's European members together accounted for 28% of the organisation's total spending in 2023, a record high in the 2014-2023 period, according to the SIPRI. The rise in military spending in Europe is in step with military escalation worldwide. World military expenditure totalled 2443 billion USD in 2023, rising by 6.8% in real terms over 2022. Climbing for the ninth year in a row, in 2023 it made the biggest year-on-year leap since 2009. Military spending by NATO member countries accounted for 55% of world military expenditure that year. NATO's combined spending (1341 billion USD) was 5.2% higher than in 2022 and 19% higher than in 2014. NATO countries also expanded their goal of spending 2% of their GDP on the military in 2023. Agreed as an objective in 2014, they began to consider it a minimum threshold.

In addition to the rise in military spending, Europe is experiencing other forms of militarisation. One such example is the greater militarisation of borders, including the border between Belarus and Poland, where forces were deployed over mutual accusations and the human rights of the migrant population and asylum seekers were violated in 2023.[18] Finland and Sweden's entry into NATO in 2023 and 2024, respectively, contributed to the trend of militarisation, as did many European countries' plans to expand the size of their militaries[19] and discussions in some countries about the possibility of bringing back compulsory military service, such as in Germany and Serbia. Other factors include setbacks in arms control mechanisms, both in Europe and worldwide. Russia withdrew definitively from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) in 2023, having previously suspended its participation in 2007, citing NATO's expansion to the east. Russia left for good in 2023, rhetorically accusing NATO of "inciting conflict in Ukraine" and ignoring its own responsibility as the invading country. Meanwhile, in March 2024, Moldova announced its decision to suspend its participation in the CFE, explaining that the circumstances that led to its signing had changed fundamentally. The Moldovan defence ministry cited Russia's withdrawal from the treaty in 2023 and its invasion of Ukraine in 2022. All this militarisation in Europe is expressed in part as a dynamic of confrontation between blocs (Russia vs. Euro-Atlantic actors), which precedes, energises and is in turn energised by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This global dynamic of conflict is in turn reflected by the

Different dynamics of militarisation and setbacks in negotiating processes in Europe are drawing energy from each other

worsening international context, such as the termination of the US-Russian dialogue on security and strategic stability that had been active since 2022.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the confrontation between Russia and the United States, the European Union and NATO have suffused and deteriorated the context in which various unresolved conflicts and negotiating processes take place in Europe, as is the case of Moldova. The Republic of Moldova is the scene of rising multidimensional and intersecting tensions influenced by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In 2023, this tension continued to worsen. During the year, the crisis included alerts in the government and allied international actors, such as Ukraine, the EU and the US, about the risks of hostile Russian action against Moldova; government action against local political actors and media outlets considered pro-Russian; warnings from Russia to Moldova; and hostile actions between them, such as the expulsion of diplomats. Some NGOs worried about the risks of violations of human rights such as freedom of expression due to some government action. Meanwhile, the context of the negotiations for the unresolved conflict over the status of Transdniestria worsened. A territory covering 4,000 km^2, with half a million inhabitants, a majority of which are Russian-speaking, Transdniestria legally falls under Moldovan sovereignty but is de facto independent and is politically and financially supported by Russia. As a whole, the future direction of the negotiating process is murky. The 5+2 negotiating format remained at a standstill due to the confrontation between Russia and Ukraine. The 5+2 format consists of the OSCE as mediator, Ukraine and Russia as mediator-guarantors and the US and the EU as observers, in addition to the parties to the conflict. The other negotiating formats (1+1 and technical working groups) also faced problems. Other contextual factors involving Russia and the antagonism between Russia and the EU made the situation even more serious and uncertain.[20] Along with Moldova, the negotiating process in Georgia has also been negatively affected by the war in Ukraine and the dynamics of confrontation between Russia and the US, the EU and NATO.[21]

In brief, different dynamics of militarisation and setbacks in peace negotiations in Europe are giving rise to short- medium- and long-term risk scenarios that are drawing energy from each other. This landscape requires concerted effort from political actors committed to conflict prevention and supportive of dialogue and mediation as a way to transform conflicts, in addition to social and public pressure to reorient the current course of militarisation and tension in Europe.

17. Calvo, Jordi, "Más gastos militares en casi todas partes", *ElDiario.es*, 24 April 2024.
18. See the summary on Belarus in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises).
19. The Economist, "Would you really die for your country?", *The Economist*, 17 April 2024.
20. See the summary on Moldova and Moldova (Transdniestria) in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises).
21. See the summary on the peace process in Georgia in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

5.5. Gaza: the erosion of international humanitarian law and the future of the global order

In recent years, armed conflicts around the world have presented some worrying trends. There has been an increase in high-intensity conflicts, with very serious levels of lethality and impacts on human security, which currently account for practically half the armed conflicts in the world. Violence has intensified, worsening in 40% of the conflicts in 2023 compared to the previous year. In general, militarisation has increased both rhetorically and in practice, with an incessant rise in military spending against a background of greater global geopolitical tension. The increased expenditure has not abated, even given the challenges imposed by the pandemic. There has also been an exponential increase in the numbers of people forcibly displaced due to conflicts, violence and human rights violations in the last decade, with more than 110 million people expelled from their homes. Along with these trends, one of the issues causing the greatest concern are the countless and profound consequences of armed conflicts on the civilian population and the persistent erosion of international humanitarian law and respect for human rights. In 2023, the situation in the Gaza Strip intensified discussion on the impacts of increasingly systematic violations in a context of impunity and on the challenges posed by applying double standards for the future of the international order.

The Israeli offensive against Gaza following the unprecedented attack by Hamas and other Palestinian groups has become a prime example of violations of international humanitarian law. Practices reported in armed conflicts elsewhere in recent years reached an unprecedented magnitude in an extremely short period of time. Tens of thousands of Palestinian civilians were killed in indiscriminate and deliberate attacks at a rate unparalleled among the armed conflicts of the 21st century. Thousands of girls and boys died in the Israeli attacks (the number of all children killed by violence in armed conflicts around the world in the previous four years was exceeded in just three months) and many others were mutilated, traumatised for life and exposed to hunger and malnutrition. Banned weapons were used in densely populated areas. Hundreds of thousands of people were forced to flee again and again to areas and along routes supposedly declared safe, but which in practice were subjected to continuous attacks. Hunger and access to water were used as weapons of war, accompanied by the systematic blocking of access to humanitarian aid and massacres of civilians during deliveries of food and other essential items for a population surrounded and on the brink. Civil infrastructure underwent massive destruction, as hospitals, homes, universities, schools and libraries were targeted, giving rise to the use of the term scholasticide.[22] Murders of hundreds of journalists, medical staff members and humanitarian workers reached unprecedented levels.

Experts have increasingly described Israel's collective punishment of the Palestinian population, and particularly the people of Gaza, as a genocide. It has also been reported that Israel is deliberately using the terminology of international humanitarian law, including concepts such as human shields, collateral damage, safe zones and evacuations, in attempts to justify its violence against the Palestinian population, subverting the protective purpose of this regulatory framework, attempting to blur distinctions between civilians and combatants and changing the application of principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. In the words of the UN special rapporteur for human rights in the occupied territories, "Israel has tried to camouflage its genocidal intent with the jargon of humanitarian law".[23]

Israel has persisted in practices that countless experts describe as flagrant violations of international law in the face of the inaction and complicity of powerful actors in the international community, mainly from the West and Global North. The United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, part of the European Union and others have continued to provide political, diplomatic and/or military coverage for Israel despite the signs of genocide, war crimes and notable human rights violations, applying obvious double standards for assessment and action. The many sanctions imposed on Putin's Russia after its invasion of Ukraine stand in contrast to the absence of sanctions against Israel. Moreover, the lack of political will to stop Israel and press for a demand as basic as a ceasefire has sent a dangerous message about the lives that matter—"the lives that deserve to be mourned", as Judith Butler has called them. Since October, the US has systematically vetoed United Nations resolutions demanding a ceasefire and only abstained in a new vote in March after an Israeli attack killed several Western aid workers. It later relativised the impact of the resolution, prompting intense discussions in diplomatic circles and among experts on international law.

In this scenario, some have been warning that what is happening in Gaza is setting dangerous precedents and not only threatens the Palestinian population, but also the future of international law and the global order built since the mid-20th century.[24] Amnesty International has warned that the response to the crisis in Gaza symbolises the failure of many of the architects of the

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22. OHCHR, *UN experts deeply concerned over 'scholasticide' in Gaza*, 18 April 2024.
23. Albanese, Francesca, *Anatomy of a Genocide,* A//HRC/55/73, 25 March 2024.
24. Rodríguez, Olga, "La impunidad israelí en Gaza difumina las líneas del derecho internacional y alcanza a víctimas occidentales", *El Diario.es*, 2 April 2024.

international system created after the Second World War for their inability to uphold a commitment to shared humanity, universality and the concept of "never again" and for dishonouring the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter, the Geneva Conventions, the Genocide Convention and international human rights law.[25] The Global North's approach towards Gaza is conveying the message that international law is only used when it is politically convenient for Western powers, that it only applies to others and that there is no unequivocal commitment to stopping or prosecuting war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. In short, as Palestinians point out, the West is willing to distort international law in favour of Israel despite its actions and its apartheid regime.[26]

The Gaza crisis has also highlighted the difficulties faced by the United Nations in acting as a guarantor of international peace and security amidst the chronic deadlock in the Security Council that has been dragging on for several years, especially after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In Palestine, the UN Secretary-General's impotence outside the Rafah crossing, where it was impossible to break the blockade on the Gaza Strip in the first few weeks of the Israeli operation, Israel's angry criticism of him, his unsuccessful appeal to extraordinary measures, such as his invocation of Article 99 of the United Nations Charter, in attempts to promote a ceasefire and avoid a humanitarian catastrophe and Israel's persecution and criminalisation of one of its main agencies, UNRWA (responsible for providing assistance to the Palestinian refugees), are just some examples in recent months that illustrate the limits and enormous challenges of UN action in this area. These events are also part of Israel's constant violation of United Nations resolutions for decades, which has continued with its policies of occupation, its expansion of illegal settlements and its fait accompli approach. Therefore, there is concern that Israel's impunity for its violations of international law and the weakening of the UN have established a scenario where norms are applied discretionally and in which the law of the strongest is imposed. The Palestinian-Israeli issue is not the only case. Russia's annexation of land and Azerbaijan's takeover of Nagorno-Karabakh through the mass expulsion of the population are other recent examples in which the framework of international law has been questioned. If we look back, the year 2023 marked the 20th anniversary of the US-led invasion of Iraq, which was carried out without UN backing and based on arguments that have since been proven false, without anyone being held accountable thus far.

Despite these problems, the United Nations indisputably remains a forum that exposes the dissonance and contradiction between what is said and what is done by those who claim to defend the principles of international law and human rights. The votes on the Palestinian issue in the UN General Assembly and the initiatives promoted by countries of the Global South regarding Gaza are examples of this. For now, the greatest expectations, especially in terms of the fight against impunity, hinge on the actions of the highest institutions of international justice. After South Africa filed its lawsuit against Israel with the International Court of Justice (ICJ),[27] the latter opened an investigation, considering that it is plausible that acts of genocide have been committed. At the same time, the highest court of the United Nations has ordered a series of provisional measures that require Israel to facilitate access for humanitarian aid and, more recently, to suspend its military operations in Rafah. The ICJ's ruling strengthens the arguments of the many demanding a ceasefire, unrestricted access for humanitarian aid and an end to arms supplies to Israel and reminding states that according to the provisions of the Convention, they are obliged to prevent and not contribute to genocide, since otherwise they risk being accomplices to it. Furthermore, the International Criminal Court (ICC), which tries people, and not states, for the commission of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, and which has been criticised in the past for focusing on countries in the Global South, especially in Africa, issued arrest warrants in May against three Hamas leaders, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant. It remains to be seen how these proceedings develop, but it is the first time that the ICC prosecutor's office has requested an arrest warrant against leaders of a Western allied country.

> *Experts on human rights have warned that the response to the crisis in Gaza symbolises the failure of many of the architects of the international system created after the Second World War for their inability to uphold a commitment to shared humanity, universality and the concept of "never again"*

25. Callamard, Agnès, *Reflections from the Secretary General on the state of human rights in 2023/24*, Amnesty International, 24 April 2024.
26. Rodríguez, Olga, "Entrevista a Ahmed Abofoul: 'Occidente está distorsionando la ley internacional al servicio de Israel'", *El Diario*.es, 18 April 2024.
27. All the documents of the International Court of Justice for this case are available in the following section on the ICJ website: Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel).

Glossary

11S: September 11th
3R: Retour, Réclamation et Réhabilitation
AA: Arakan Army
AAPP: Association for Assistance to Political Prisoners
ABSDF: All Burma Students' Democratic Front
ABM: Ansar Beit al-Maqdis
ACLED: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project
ACSS: Africa Center for Strategic Studies
ACT: Ambazonia Coalition Team
ADF: Allied Democratic Forces
ADF: Ambazonia Defence Forces
ADF-NALU: Allied Democratic Forces - National Army for the Liberation of Uganda
AFF: Afghanistan Freedom Front
AFL: Afghanistan Liberation Movement
AGC: Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (Gaitanistas Self-Defense Forces of Colombia)
AGovC: Ambazonia Governing Council
AKP: Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)
ALAF: Libyan Arab Armed Forces
ALBA: Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America)
ALDEA: Asociación Latinoamericana para el Desarrollo Alternativo (Latin American Association for Alternative Development)
ALP: Arakan Liberation Party
AMISOM: African Union Mission in Somalia
ANRHI: Arab Network for Human Rights Information
APCLS: Alliance des patriotes pour un Congo libre et souverain (Alliance of Patriots for a Free and Sovereign Congo)
AQIM: Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
AQPA: Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
ARS: Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia
ARSA: Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army
ASEAN: Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASWJ: Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama'a
ATMIS: African Union Transition Mission in Somalia
AU: African Union
AUBP: African Union Border Program
BDB: Benghazi Defense Brigades
BH: Boko Haram
BIFF: Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters
BINUH: United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti
BJP: Bharatiya Janata Party
BLA: Baloch Liberation Army
BLF: Baloch Liberation Front
BLT: Baloch Liberation Tigers
BRA: Balochistan Republican Army
BRN: Barisan Revolusi Nasional
BRP: Baloch Republican Party
CAR: Central African Republic
CCMSR: Conseil de Commandement Militaire pour le Salut de la République (Military Command Council for the Salvation of the Republic)
CENCO: Conférence Épiscopale Nationale du Congo (Congolese Episcopal Conference)
CERAC: Centro de Recursos para el Análisis de Conflictos (Conflict Analysis Resource Center)
CHD: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue
CIDE: Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (Economic Research and Teaching Center)
CJNC: Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación (Jalisco New Generation Cartel)
CJTF: Civilian Joint Task Force
CMA: Coordination of Movements of Azawad
CMC: Coalition of Movements for Change
CMDPH: Mexican Commission for the Defense and Promotion of Human Rights
CMPFPR: Coordinating Committee of Patriotic Resistance Movements
CNDD-FDD: Congrès National pour la Défense de la Démocratie - Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie (National Congress for the Defense of Democracy - Forces for the Defense of Democracy)
CNDP: Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple (National Congress for the Defense of the People)
CNF: Chin National Front
CNL: Congrès National pour la Liberté (National Congress for Freedom)
CNRD-Ubwiyunge: Conseil National pour le Renouveau et la Démocratie (National Council for Renewal and Democracy)
CODECO: Coopérative pour le développement du Congo (Cooperative for the development of Congo)
CODNI: Comité Organizador para el Diálogo Nacional Inclusivo (Organizing Committee for the National Inclusive Dialogue)
CONAIE: Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas de Ecuador (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador)
COP 27: 27th United Nations Climate Change Conference 2022
CPA: Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CPC: Coalition des patriotes pour le changement (Coalition of Patriots for Change)
CPCR: Cade permanent de concertation et de réflexion (Permanent framework for consultation and reflection)
CPI-M: Communist Party of India-Maoist
CSFA: Supreme Council of the Fuerzas Armadas
DAG: Dyck Advisory Group
DDR: Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DFLP: Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
DGCIM: Dirección General de Contrainteligencia Militar (General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence)
DKBA: Democratic Karen Buddhist Army
DMLEK: Democratic Movement for the Liberation of the Eritrean Kunama
DNIS: Inclusive and Sovereign National Dialogue)
DPA: Darfur Peace Agreement
DRC: Democratic Republic of the Congo
EAC: East African Community
ECCAS: Economic Community of Central African States
ECOWAS: Economic Community Of West African States

EDA: Eritrean Democratic Alliance
EFDM: Eritrean Federal Democratic Movement
EHRC: Ethiopian Human Rights Comission
EIC: Eritrean Islamic Congress
EIPJD: Eritrean Islamic Party for Justice and Development
ELF: Eritrean Liberation Front
ELN: Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army)
ENSF: Eritrean National Salvation Front
EPC: Eritrean People's Congress
EPDF: Eritrean People's Democratic Front
EPL: Ejército Popular de Liberación (Popular Liberation Army)
EPR: Ejército Popular Revolucionario (People's Revolutionary Army)
EPRDF: Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
ERPI: Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo Insurgente (Revolutionary Army of the Insurgent People)
ESN: Eastern Safety Net
ETA: Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (Basque Country and Freedom)
ETIM: East Turkestan Islamic Movement
ETLO: East Turkestan Liberation Organization
EU: European Union
EUCAP NESTOR: European Union Mission on Regional Maritime Capacity-Building in the Horn of Africa
EUCAP SAHEL Mali: European Union Capacity Building Mission in Mali
EUCAP SAHEL Niger: European Union Capacity Building Mission in Niger
EUFOR: European Union Force
EULEX: European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo
EUNAVFOR Somalia: European Union Naval Force in Somalia - Operation Atalanta
EUTM Mali: European Union Training Mission in Mali
EUTM Somalia: European Union Training Mission in Somalia
EUTM Mozambique: European Union Training Mission in Mozambique
EZLN: Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista National Liberation Army)
FACT: Front for Change and Harmony in Chad
FADM: Mozambique Armed Forces
FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FAR-LP: Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Liberación del Pueblo (Revolutionary Armed Forces for the Liberation of the People)
FARC: Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)
FARC-EP: Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Ejército del Pueblo (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army)
FATA: Federally Administered Tribal Areas
FDLR: Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda)
FFC: Forces for Freedom and Change
FFC-CC: Forces for Freedom and Change-Central Command

FIS: Front Islamique du Salut (Islamic Salvation Front)
FLEC-FAC: Frente de Liberação do Enclave de Cabinda (Cabinda Enclave's Liberation Front)
FLM: Front de Libération du Macina (Macina Liberation Front)
FNL: Forces Nationales de Libération (National Liberation Forces)
FPB: Forces Populaires du Burundi (Popular Forces of Burundi)
FPR: Front Populaire pour le Redressement (Popular Front for Recovery)
FPRC: Front Patriotique pour la Renaissance de la Centrafrique (Patriotic Front for the Renaissance of the Central African Republic)
FRELIMO: Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (Front for the Liberation of Mozambique)
FSA: Free Syrian Army
FRUD-armé: United Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy-Armed
G20: Group of Twenty
G5 SAHEL: Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel
G7: Group of Seven
GATIA: Groupe Autodéfense Touareg Imghad et Alliés (Imghad Tuareg Self-Defense Group and Allies)
GBAO: Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region
GDI: Gender Inequality Index
GERD: Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam
GFT: Transitional Federal Government
GNA: Government of National Accord
GSIM: Groupe de Soutien à l'Islam et aux Musulmans (Support Group for Islam and Muslims)
GSPC: Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat)
HCUA: High Council for Unity of Azawad
HDI: Human Development Index
HIMARS: High Mobility Artillery Rocket System
HRMMU: United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine
HRW: Human Rights Watch
HTS: Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham
IAEA: International Atomic Energy Agency
IBC: Iraq Body Count
ICC: International Criminal Court
ICG: International Crisis Group
ICRC: International Committee of the Red Cross
ICU: Islamic Courts Union
ICTY: International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
IDMC: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IFLO: Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia
IG SAKO: Interim Government - Sako
IG SISIKU: Interim Government - Sisiku
IGAD: Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IISS: International Institute for Strategic Studies
ILGA: International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association
IOM: International Organization for Migration
IMN: Islamic Movement of Nigeria
IMF: International Monetary Fund
INEC: Independent National Electoral Commission

IPAC: Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict
IPI: International Press Institute
IPOB: Indigenous People of Biafra
IRGC: Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
ISCAP: Islamic State Central African Province
ISGS: Islamic State in the Greater Sahara
ISIS: Islamic State
ISIS-KP: Islamic State of Khorasan Province
ISMP: Islamic State of Mozambique Province
ISWAP: Islamic State in the West African Province
IWF: Iduwini Volunteers Force
JAS: Jama´atu Ahlus-Sunna Lidda´Awati Wal Jihad
JAS-Abubakar Shekau: Jama´atu Ahlus-Sunna facción Abubakar Shekau
JCPOA: Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
JEM: Justice and Equality Movement
JKLF: Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front
JMB: Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen (Mujahideen Assembly)
JNIM: Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (Support Group for Islam and Muslims)
KANU: Kenya African National Union
KCP: Kangleipak Communist Party
KDP: Kurdistan Democratic Party
KDPI: Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran
KFOR: Kosovo Force
KIA: Kachin Independence Army
KLA: Kosovo Liberation Army
KNA: Kuki Liberation Army
KNDF: Karenni Nationalities Defence Force
KNF: Kuki National Front
KNPP: Karenni National Progressive Party
KNU: Kayin National Union
KNU/KNLA: Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army
KPLT: Karbi People's Liberation Tigers
KRG: Kurdistan Regional Government
KYKL: Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (Organization to Save the Revolutionary Movement in Manipur)
LeJ: Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (Army of Jhangvi)
LeT: Lashkar-e-Taiba (Army of the Good)
LGBTIQ+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer +
LNA: Libyan National Army
LRA: Lord's Resistance Army
LTTE: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
M-19: Movimiento 19 de Abril (April 19 Movement)
M23: March 23 Movement
MAA: Mouvement Arabe de l'Azawad (Arab Movement of Azawad)
MARA Patani: Majlis Amanah Rakyat Patani
MASSOB: Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra
MB: Muslim Brotherhood
MDM: Democratic Movement of Mozambique
MEND: Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta
MFDC: Mouvement de las Forces Démocratiques de Casamance (Movement of Democratic Forces in the Casamance)
MILF: Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MINUJUSTH: United Nations Mission to Support Justice in Haiti
MINUSCA: United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
MINUSMA: United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MINUSTAH: United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti
MIT: Mujahidin Indonesia Timur
MLC: Mouvement pour la Libération du Congo (Movement for the Liberation of the Congo)
MLCJ: Mouvement des libérateurs centrafricains pour la justice (Movement of Central African Liberators for Justice)
MLF: Macina Liberation Front
MLRS: Multiple Launch Rocket System
MNDAA: Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army
MNJTF: Multinational Joint Task Force
MNLA: Mouvement National pour la Libération de L'Azawad (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad)
MNLF: Moro National Liberation Front
MONUSCO: United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC
MOSOP: Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People
MPC: Mouvement Patriotique pour la Centrafrique (Patriotic Movement for Central Africa)
MPSR: Mouvement Patriotique pour la Sauvegarde et la Restauration (Patriotic Movement for Safeguarding and Restoration)
MRC: Mombasa Republican Council
MS13: Mara Salvatrucha
MSF: Doctors Without Borders
MUYAO: United Movement for Jihad in West Africa
NAS: National Salvation Front
NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCP: National Congress Party
NDA: Niger Delta Avengers
NDAA: National Democratic Alliance Army
NDC-R: Nduma Defense of Congo-Renovated
NDF: National Democratic Front
NDFB: National Democratic Front of Boroland
NDFB (IKS): National Democratic Front of Boroland (IK Songbijit)
NDGJM: Niger Delta Greenland Justice Mandate
NDM-PF: National Democratic Movement-Patriotic Front
NDPVF: Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force
NDV: Niger Delta Vigilante (Niger Delta Patrol)
NGO: Non-Governmental Organization
NGO WGWPS: NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security
NLAW: Next Generation Light Anti-Tank Weapon
NLL: Northern Limit Line
NMSP: New Mon State Party
NNC: Naga National Council NPA: New People's Army
NPA: New People's Army
NRF: National Resistance Front
NSCN (K-K): National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Kole-Kitovi)

NSCN-IM: National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isaac Muivah

NSCN-K: National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang

NSCN-R: National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Reformation

NSLA: National Santhal Liberation Army

NSF: Nigerian Security Forces

NSSSOG: Non-Signatory South Sudan Opposition Groups

NST: Nigeria Security Tracker

NTF-ELCAC: National Task Force to End the Local Communist Armed Conflict

OAS: Organization of American States

OCHA: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

OFDM: Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement

OIC: Organization for Islamic Cooperation

OLF: Oromo Liberation Front

ONLF: Ogaden National Liberation Front

OPC: Oromo People's Congress

OPM: Organisasi Papua Merdeka (Organization of Free Papua)

OSCE: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

OTSC: Collective Security Work Organization

OVCS: Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social (Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict)

OVV: Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia (Venezuelan Violence Observatory)

OXFAM: Oxford Committee for Famine Relief

PA: Palestinian Authority

PANDEF: Pan Niger Delta Forum

PCF: Communist Party of the Philippines

PDF: Popular Defence Forces

PDKI: Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan

PIJ: Palestinian Islamic Jihad

PFLP: Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine

PJAK: Party of Free Life of Kurdistan

PKK: Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (Kurdistan Workers' Party)

PLA: People's Liberation Army

POLISARIO Front: Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Río de Oro

PML-N: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz

PNLO: Pa-O National Liberation Organisation

PP: Prosperity Party

PPP: Pakistan People's Party

PREPAK: People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak

PREPAK (Pro): People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak – Progressive

PROVEA: Venezuelan Program Education Action on Human Rights

PS: Province of Sinai

PULO: Patani United Liberation Organisation

PYD : Democratic Union Party of Kurds in Syria

R-ARCC: Revitalized Agreement on Conflict Resolution in South Sudan

RCSS: Restoration Council of Shan State

RED-Tabara: Résistance pour un État de Droit au Burundi (Resistance for the Rule of Law in Burundi)

RENAMO: Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (Mozambican National Resistance)

REWL: Red Egbesu Water Lions

RFI: Radio France International

RNLF: Rabha National Liberation Front

RPD Corea: Democratic People's Republic of Korea

RPF: Rwandan Patriotic Front

RPF: Revolutionary People's Front

RSADO: Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization

RSF: Rapid Support Forces

RUD-Urunana: Ralliement pour l'unité et la démocratie (RUD)-Urunana (Rally for Unity and Democracy (RUD)-Urunana)

SADC: Southern Africa Development Community

SADR: Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic

SAMIM: Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique

SCACUF: Southern Cameroons Ambazonia Consortium United Front

SCDF: Southern Cameroons Restoration Forces

SCF: Shiite Coordination Framework

SEBIN: Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia Nacional (Bolivarian National Intelligence Service)

SIGI: Social Institutions and Gender Index

SIPRI: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

SLA: Sudan Liberation Army

SLA-AW: Sudan Liberation Army - Abdul Wahid

SLA-MM: Sudan Liberation Army- Minni Minnawi

SLDF: Sabaot Land Defence Forces

SNNRPS: Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Regional State

SOCADEF: Southern Cameroons Defence Forces

SOHR: Syrian Observatory for Human Rights

SPLA: Sudan People's Liberation Army

SPLA-IO: Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition

SPLM: Sudan People's Liberation Movement

SPLM-FD: Sudan People's Liberation Movement-Freed Detainees

SPLM-N: Sudan People's Liberation Army-North

SRF: Sudan Revolutionary Forces

SSA: Shan State Army

SSA-N: Shan State Army – North

SSC: Sool, Saanag and Cayn

SSDM/A: South Sudan Democratic Movement/Army

SSLA: South Sudan Liberation Army

SSOMA: South Sudan Opposition Movements Alliance

SSPDF: South Sudan Armed Forces

SSPP: Shan State Progress Party

SSPP/SSA: Shan State Progress Party/ Shan State Army

SSUF: South Sudan United Front

STC: Southern Transitional Council

TAK: Teyrêbazên Azadiya Kurdistan (Kurdistan Freedom Falcons)

TEDH: European Court of Human Rights

TNLA: Ta-ang National Liberation Army

TFG: Transitional Federal Government

TPLF: Tigrayan People's Liberation Front

TRF: The Resistence Front

TTP: Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan
UAE: United Arab Emirates
UDA: United Democratic Alliance
UDRM/A: United Democratic Revolutionary Movement/ Army
UFDD: Union des Forces pour la Démocratie et le Développement (Union of the Forces for Democracy and Development)
UFR: Unión de Fuerzas de Resistencia (Union of Resistance Forces)
ULFA: United Liberation Front of Assam
ULFA-I: United Liberation Front of Assam - Independent
UMP: Unidades de Movilización Popular (Popular Mobilization Units)
UN: United Nations
UNAMA: United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNAMI: United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq
UNAMID: United Nations and African Union Mission in Darfur
UNDP: United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA: United Nations Population Fund
UNHCHR: United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFIL: United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
UNISFA: United Nations Interim Security Force in Abyei
UNITAMS: United Nations Integrated Mission for Transition Assistance in Sudan
UNJHRO: United Nations Joint Human Rights Office

(DRCongo)
UNLF: United National Liberation Front
UNMIK: United Nations Mission in Kosovo
UNMIL: United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNMISS: United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UNODC: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNOWAS: United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel
UNRWA: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UNSMIL: United Nations Support Mission in Libya
UPC: Union pour la Paix en Centrafrique (Union for Peace in Central Africa)
UPDF: Uganda People's Defense Forces
UPLA: United People's Liberation Army
USA: United States of America
USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
UWSA: United Wa State Army
VRAE: Valle de los Ríos Apurímac y Ene (Valley between Rivers Apurimac and Ene)
WB: World Bank
WFP: World Food Programme of the United Nations
WILPF: Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
WTO: World Trade Organization
YPG: People's Protection Unit
YPJ: Women's Protection Units
ZUF: Zeliangrong United Front

Escola de Cultura de Pau

The Escola de Cultura de Pau (School for a Culture of Peace, hereinafter ECP) is an academic peace research institution located at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. The School for a Culture of Peace was created in 1999 with the aim of promoting the culture of peace through research, Track II diplomacy, training and awareness generating activities.

The main fields of action of the Escola de Cultura de Pau are:

- Research. Its main areas of research include armed conflicts and socio-political crises, peace processes, human rights and transitional justice, the gender dimension in conflict and peacebuilding, and peace education.

- Track II diplomacy. The ECP promotes dialogue and conflict-transformation through Track II initiatives, including facilitation tasks with armed actors.

- Consultancy services. The ECP carries out a variety of consultancy services for national and international institutions.

- Teaching and training. ECP staff gives lectures in postgraduate and graduate courses in several universities, including its own Graduate Diploma on Culture of Peace at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. It also provides training sessions on specific issues, including conflict sensitivity and peace education.

- Advocacy and awareness-raising. Initiatives include activities addressed to the Spanish and Catalan society, including contributions to the media.

Alert 2024! Report on conflicts, human rights and peace-building is a yearbook providing an analysis of the state of the world in terms of conflict and peacebuilding from three perspectives: armed conflicts, socio-political crises and gender, peace and security. The analysis of the most important events in 2023 and of the nature, causes, dynamics, actors and consequences of the main armed conflicts and socio-political crises that currently exist in the world makes it possible to provide a comparative regional overview and to identify global trends, as well as risk and early warning elements for the future. Similarly, the report also identifies opportunities for peacebuilding and for reducing, preventing and resolving conflicts. In both cases, one of the main aims of this report is to place data, analyses and the identified warning signs and opportunities for peace in the hands of those actors responsible for making policy decisions or those who participate in peacefully resolving conflicts or in raising political, media and academic awareness of the many situations of political and social violence taking place around the world.
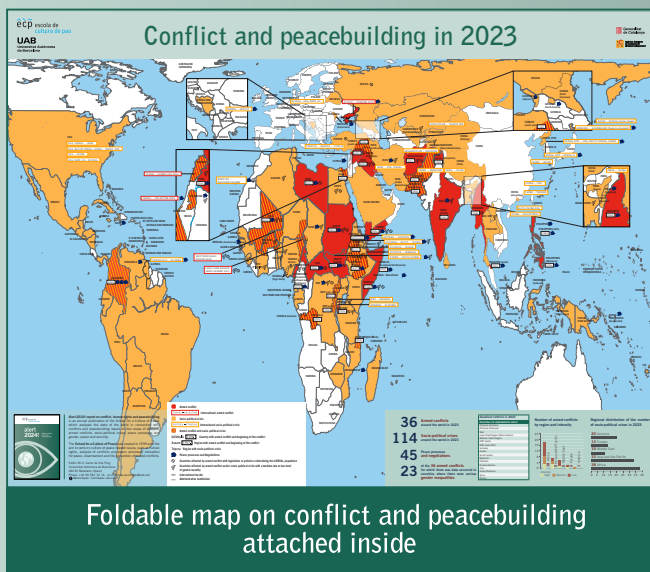
Each of the past 22 years, the Escola de Cultura de Pau (School for a Culture of Peace) has offered the world an extensive and thoughtful overview of the tensions and conflict that push us apart. As we enter a new age of global competition, wars of aggression, extensive harm to civilians, democratic backsliding and global backlash against gender equality, the kind of analysis and insight that the *Alert!* report provides is more needed than ever to keep our eyes open and our brains thinking about the world we want to pass on to the next generation. This is the kind of report that should lead to action towards preserving and advancing our most precious collective goods: peace, security and the rule of law, within a fairer global system.

Ornella Moderan
Independent Researcher, Senior SSR Advisor, Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF)

The vast panorama of armed conflicts affecting the international system is difficult to grasp in all its complexity. Nevertheless, thanks to the meticulous and rigorous work of the School for a Culture of Peace in its report *Alert!*, we can better understand today what is happening in the world in the field of conflict and how it has evolved in recent years. Through the collection of data, the discussion of criteria, the application of classifications or the proposal of new topics we know reality better. And this is the first step to transform it. We just have to wait for *Alert!* to continue to accompany us for a long time, providing us with very powerful arguments to discard the violent way as a resource.

Laura Feliu Martínez
Senior Lecturer on International Relations, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB)

The strongest part of the *Alert!* report is the team that writes it, with their long and solid experience conducting reputable and rigorous analysis that helps us to understand the trends, dynamics and scenarios of the armed conflicts and political crises around the world. Their strength also flows from their conviction that these problems can and must be addressed constructively, warning of the consequences of pursuing violence and questioning an opportunistic geopolitics rarely concerned primarily with people. Written from the perspective of a culture of peace, this report rises above the din of arms and prioritises justice and respect for differences. War first arises in people's minds and the *Alert!* report reminds us each year that it is also our responsibility to discredit it and to provide it with lasting and viable alternatives.

Alejandro Pozo Marín
Researcher for Centre Delàs and Doctors without Borders

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Conflict and peacebuilding in 2023

36	Armed conflicts around the world in 2023
114	Socio-political crises around the world in 2023
45	Peace negotiations
23	of the 36 armed conflicts for which there was data incorporated the gender perspective

Foldable map on conflict and peacebuilding attached inside

With the support of:

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