

4. Armed conflict

Overview

This chapter reports on recent developments in peace and conflict trends, focusing primarily on data collected through 2013. Based on its preliminary findings, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) reported in early 2015 that there were more wars in 2014 than any other year since year 2000. Several other sources subsequently made similar observations: violence increased in 2014. In retrospect, 2014 may stand out as a particularly distressing year. However, there were few, if any, predictive indicators of the violence that unfolded in 2014, including Russia's annexation of Crimea and support of violent separatism in eastern Ukraine; the brutality of Boko Haram in Nigeria; a new Gaza War; and territorial advances of ISIS in Iraq. Against this backdrop, the first two sections of this chapter focus thematically on specific issues related to peace and conflict and the second two sections discuss these issues more broadly.

Section I provides an overview of the scholarship examining the relationship between gender and peace, a topic that has become a real concern for international peace and security since United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000—one of the UN's most renown decisions, celebrating its 15th anniversary in 2015. The authors present convincing evidence that states with high measures of gender equality are less likely to encounter civil war, interstate war or widespread human rights abuses than states with low measures. They also observe that the 2014 war experiences mentioned above seem 'to coincide with the areas in which gender relations have worsened substantially, in particular in parts of the Middle East and Africa' and that 'the worsening oppression of women is particularly ominous because of the relationship between gender equality and peace'. Thus, policies of social exclusion primarily directed against women are likely to generate tensions in society and foreshadow wars within and between states. They serve as early warning indicators to an international community concerned with peace and security.

Section II highlights and points to the diversity of war and peace in Africa. Contrary to many beliefs there are parts of Africa that have remained outside the cycles of large-scale violence and wars. These 'zones of peace' include ten countries that have been entirely free from such violent dynamics. Building on UCDP data, the section describes important variations over time, observing that the year 2005 was entirely without war in Africa. Historical legacies play a role in subsequent patterns of armed conflict. Most countries left colonial

dominance without armed conflict, but later struggles were more violent. These conflicts, furthermore, became intertwined with cold war dynamics. In the post-cold war period the largest wars have been fought in the Horn of Africa, including Sudan. For much of this period, peace agreements and UN peacekeeping operations became increasingly important to the ending of armed conflict. However, since 2009, the authors note, there have been no wars concluded with peace settlements, something they describe as ‘a worrying development’.

Section III reports on the trends in state-based armed conflict, non-state violent conflicts and one-sided violence for 2004–13. Each type of conflict has its own dynamic and a trend in one type of conflict does not correlate to a trend in another (e.g. a decline in one is not accompanied by a similar decline in others). State-based armed conflicts provide the most destruction and battle-related deaths inflicted by organized violence. In this regard, the civil war in Syria stands out. Available data points to a particularly severe situation in the Middle East, where deaths in state-based conflicts increased for the most recent years of the period. Similarly, there were signs of increasing non-state violent conflict since 2010 in the Middle East and in Africa. There was also a rise in one-sided violence, particularly by non-state actors. Together with data on refugees, this may have made it possible to predict that 2014 would be notably violent in the Middle East. Conversely, there is nothing in the trend data that suggested an imminent threat to Ukraine. A record of different types of violence may signal a danger of escalation, but the absence of violence does not suggest the absence of threats of violence.

Section IV includes the annual presentation of the Global Peace Index. It demonstrates a continued and slow decline in global levels of peacefulness. While Europe was the most peaceful part of the world, the GPI only extends until March 2014, which also marks the beginning of deteriorating relations between Russia and Ukraine, affecting Europe as a whole. The Middle East and North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa stand out as less peaceful areas, largely due to wars. In South America, indicators relating to criminality were more important in recording lack of peacefulness (e.g. homicide rates), whereas austerity measures leading to unrest affected Europe’s standing on the GPI. Still, the authors do not see this overall decline for the past seven years as indicative of a long-term trend, but instead conclude that the world nevertheless is more peaceful today than in ‘all periods before the year 2000’.

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