

## II. Patterns of armed conflict, 2006–15

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This section provides an overview of the past ten years of active armed conflicts and a focus on 2015.<sup>1</sup> In this section, armed conflict is defined as a contested incompatibility between two parties—at least one of which is the government of a state—that concerns government or territory or both, and where the use of armed force by the parties results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in a calendar year. An armed conflict that results in 1000 battle-related deaths in a year is classified as a ‘war’ in that year; other armed conflicts are classified as ‘minor armed conflicts’. This definition extends from low-intensity conflicts that are active for just one or a few years—such as the territorial conflict between the Indian separatist rebel group the Garo National Liberation Army, GNLA, which was listed as active in 2012 and 2014—to high-intensity, protracted conflicts that go on for a long period, such as the conflict over governmental power in Afghanistan that has pitted successive governments against a range of rebel groups since 1978 and where fighting is still ongoing. For the purpose of this section, a conflict is thus classified as ‘active’ when fighting causes 25 or more battle-related deaths in a year. Cases that fall below this threshold for any reason, such as a de-escalation of hostilities or the signing of a ceasefire, are not listed as active in UCDP data.<sup>2</sup>

### Global patterns

The number of active armed conflicts increased from 41 to 50 in 2015, an increase of 22 per cent on the previous year (see table 6.3).<sup>3</sup> This is in line with developments in the previous six-year-period, which was characterized by steep falls and rises in the number of conflicts from one year to the next, but a steep increase in the past three years. As is explained below, the increase from 2014 to 2015 is by and large due to the expansion of the Salafi jihadist militant group the Islamic State (IS) into new territories. This expansion has

<sup>1</sup> In the SIPRI Yearbooks 2012–14, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) contributed a chapter on ‘organized violence’, which included armed conflict, as reported here, non-state conflicts (conflicts between non-state actors) and one-sided violence (violence carried out by a state or an organized group, targeting unarmed civilians). UCDP will present new data on all these categories in the Sep. issue of the *Journal of Peace Research*, which will be freely available from <ucdp.uu.se>.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that listing conflicts as no longer active—i.e. not exceeding 25 fatalities in a calendar year—does not imply that the incompatibility has been resolved and that it has been terminated in the long term. In some conflicts this may be the case but in others it may not. Only time will tell. Thus, in this section, the description of a conflict as not being active only refers to the fact that it is not included in the list of active armed conflicts in a given year.

<sup>3</sup> In earlier publications, UCDP reported 40 active armed conflicts in 2014. Due to new information becoming available, this has now been revised to 41.

caused new groups to emerge and join IS, but primarily it has led to already active conflicts being transformed in such a way so as to be recorded as new conflicts in UCDP data.<sup>4</sup>

Of the 50 active conflicts, only one was fought between states (India–Pakistan). This low number of interstate conflicts is not new. There were only four interstate conflicts in the 10-year period 2006–15 (Cambodia–Thailand, Djibouti–Eritrea, India–Pakistan and South Sudan–Sudan), while on an annual basis the number was between zero and one. The remaining 49 conflicts were fought within states and concerned government (19), territory (29) or both (1). While the distribution of conflicts between these two types of incompatibilities, or conflict issues, has tended to vary from one year to the next—with conflicts over government being in the majority one year and those over territory the next—the gap between them in 2015 was the biggest recorded in the 2006–15 period. The number of territorial conflicts increased drastically in 2015, a shift largely driven by developments related to IS which are discussed below.

In recent years there has been a clear increase, in both absolute and relative terms, in the number of internationalized intrastate conflicts, or conflicts in which troops from a state that is external to the basic conflict assist one of the parties, and this increase continued in 2015. During the year, 20 of the 49 intrastate conflicts (41 per cent) involved troops from an external state fighting on one or both sides. This is by far the highest percentage of internationalized conflicts in the period 2006–15, which, in turn, is the period that from a long-term perspective has proved to be the most prone to this kind of conflict. As has been reported in previous Yearbooks and in other publications, this is worrying since research has shown that external involvement tends to make conflicts more lethal and to prolong them.<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that in 2015, 10 of the internationalized conflicts were fought against IS, al-Qaeda (including al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb, AQIM) or the Taliban.

Eleven wars were recorded in 2015, which is one less than in 2014—the peak year of the period. In absolute numbers this is the second highest level recorded in the 2006–15 period. The number moved between four and seven in 2006–13. The percentage of wars (22 per cent) was still unusually high

<sup>4</sup> For a conflict to be transformed enough to be recorded as new, it is required that the organization fighting the government: (a) changes its name or becomes part of another group; and (b) states a new incompatibility. Both these requirements were met in the two cases of already active groups pledging allegiance to IS and being accepted; they were subsumed into IS and became new provinces, or ‘wilayahs’ in the caliphate that IS is fighting to create, and began fighting territorial conflicts against ‘their’ governments, striving for the inclusion of their provinces into the future Islamic State. On IS see chapter 2, section II, in this volume.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Themnér, L. and Wallensteen, P., ‘Armed conflicts, 1946–2010’, *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 48, no. 4 (July 2011), pp. 525–36; section III in this chapter; and chapter 4, section I, in this volume.

**Table 6.3.** Armed conflicts active in 2015

For more detailed definitions of the terms used see the table notes.

Location <sup>a</sup>	Parties <sup>b</sup>	Incompatibility <sup>c</sup>	Start year <sup>d</sup>	Intensity	Change from 2014 <sup>e</sup>
<i>Africa</i>					
Algeria	Government of Algeria vs. al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)	Government	1998/ 1999	Minor	↘
Burundi	Government of Burundi vs. Les Forces Republicaines du Burundi (Forebu, Republican Forces of Burundi)	Government	2015/ 2015	Minor	n.a.
	vs. Military faction of General Godefroid Niyombare		2015/ 2015	Minor	n.a.
Cameroon	Government of Cameroon, Chad vs. Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (Boko Haram)	Government	2015/ 2015	Minor	n.a.
Cameroon	Government of Cameroon, Chad vs. Islamic State (IS)	Territory ('Islamic State')	2015/ 2015	Minor	n.a.
Chad	Government of Chad vs. Islamic State (IS)	Territory ('Islamic State')	2015/ 2015	Minor	n.a.
Ethiopia	Government of Ethiopia vs. Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF)	Territory (Ogaden)	1994/ 1994	Minor	→
Ethiopia	Government of Ethiopia vs. Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)	Territory (Oromiya)	1974/ 1977	Minor	n.a.
Kenya	Government of Kenya vs. al-Shabab	Territory (Northeastern Province and Coast)	2015/ 2015	Minor	n.a.
Libya	Government of Libya vs. Forces of the House of Representatives	Government	2015/ 2015	Minor	n.a.
Libya	Government of Libya vs. Islamic State (IS)	Territory ('Islamic State')	2015/ 2015	Minor	n.a.
Mali	Government of Mali, France, MINUSMA <sup>f</sup> vs. al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)	Government	2009/ 2009	Minor	↘
Mali	Government of Mali, MINUSMA vs. Mouvement national pour la libération de l'Azawad (CMA, National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad)	Territory (Azawad)	2012/ 2012	Minor	↘
Mali	Government of Mali vs. Front de Libération du Macina (FLM, Macina Liberation Front)	Territory ('Macina Empire')	2015/ 2015	Minor	n.a.

Location <sup>a</sup>	Parties <sup>b</sup>	Incompatibility <sup>c</sup>	Start year <sup>d</sup>	Intensity	Change from 2014 <sup>e</sup>
Niger	Government of Niger, Chad vs. Islamic State (IS)	Territory ('Islamic State')	2015/2015	Minor	n.a.
Nigeria (Nigeria, Niger, Chad)	Governments of Nigeria, Chad, Niger vs. Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (Boko Haram)	Government	2009/2009	War	↘
Nigeria	Governments of Nigeria, Chad, Niger vs. Islamic State (IS)	Territory ('Islamic State')	2015/2015	War	n.a.
Somalia (Somalia, Kenya)	Government of Somalia, AMISOM <sup>g</sup> vs. al-Shabab	Government	2008/2008	War	↗
South Sudan	Governments of South Sudan, Uganda vs. SPLM/A In Opposition	Government	2013/2013	Minor	↘
Sudan	Government of Sudan vs. Darfur Joint Resistance Forces vs. Al-Jabhat Al-Thawriyat Al-Sudan (SRF, Sudan Revolutionary Front)	Government	2014/2011	Minor War	↘ ↗
Uganda (DRC)	Government of Uganda, DR Congo vs. Alliance of Democratic Forces (ADF)	Government	1996/1996	Minor	↘
<i>Americas</i>					
Colombia	Government of Colombia vs. Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN, National Liberation Army) vs. Fuerzas armadas revolucionarias colombianas (FARC, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)	Government	1965/1966 1964/1964	Minor Minor	n.a. ↘
USA (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria)	Governments of USA, Afghanistan, Pakistan vs. al-Qaeda	Government	2001/2001	Minor	↘
<i>Asia</i>					
Afghanistan (Afghanistan, Pakistan)	Government of Afghanistan, Pakistan, USA vs. Taliban	Government	1995/1995	War	↗
Afghanistan	Governments of Afghanistan, Pakistan, USA vs. Islamic State (IS)	Territory ('Islamic State')	2015/2015	Minor	n.a.
India	Government of India vs. Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist)	Government	2005/2005	Minor	↘

Location <sup>a</sup>	Parties <sup>b</sup>	Incompatibility <sup>c</sup>	Start year <sup>d</sup>	Intensity	Change from 2014 <sup>e</sup>
India (India, Myanmar)	Government of India vs. United Liberation Front of Western South East Asia (UNLFW)	Territory ('Western South East Asia')	2015/2015	Minor	n.a.
India	Government of India vs. Kashmir insurgents	Territory (Kashmir)	1984/1990	Minor	↘
India, Pakistan	Government of India vs. Government of Pakistan	Territory (Kashmir)	1948/1948	Minor	↘
Myanmar	Government of Myanmar vs. Kachin Independence Organization (KIO)	Territory (Shan)	1961/1961	Minor	↗
Myanmar	Government of Myanmar vs. Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA)	Territory (Kokang)	2009/2009	Minor	↗
Myanmar	Government of Myanmar vs. Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF)	Territory (Paulung)	1994/2013	Minor	↗
Myanmar	Government of Myanmar vs. Shan State Progress Party (SSPP)	Territory (Shan)	2006/2011	Minor	n.a.
Pakistan	Governments of Pakistan, Afghanistan vs. Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP, Taliban Movement of Pakistan)	Government	2007/2007	War	↘
Pakistan	Government of Pakistan vs. Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA)	Territory (Balochistan)	2004/2004	Minor	↘
	vs. Baloch Liberation Front (BLF)		1973/1974	Minor	n.a.
	vs. Balochistan Republican Army (BRA)		2007/2008	Minor	↘
Philippines	Government of Philippines vs. Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP)	Government	1969/1969	Minor	↘
Philippines	Government of Philippines vs. Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)	Territory (Mindanao)	1993/1993	Minor	↗
	vs. Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFM)		2012/2012	Minor	↗
	vs. Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)		1990/1990	Minor	n.a.
Thailand	Government of Thailand vs. Parani insurgents	Territory: (Patani)	1965/2003	Minor	↘
<i>Europe</i>					
Azerbaijan (Azerbaijan, Armenia)	Government of Azerbaijan vs. Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, Government of Armenia	Territory (Nagorno-Karabakh)	1991/1991	Minor	↗
Russia	Government of Russia vs. Forces of the Caucasus Emirate	Territory ('Caucasus Emirate')	2007/2007	Minor	↘

Location <sup>a</sup>	Parties <sup>b</sup>	Incompatibility <sup>c</sup>	Start year <sup>d</sup>	Intensity	Change from 2014 <sup>e</sup>
Russia	Government of Russia vs. Islamic State (IS)	Territory ('Islamic State')	2015/2015	Minor	n.a.
Ukraine	Government of Ukraine vs. United Armed Forces of Novorossiia, Government of Russia	Territory ('Novorossiia')	2014/2014	War	↘
<i>Middle East</i>					
Egypt	Government of Egypt vs. Islamic State (IS)	Territory ('Islamic State')	2014/2015	Minor	n.a.
Iraq (Iraq, France, Syria)	Governments of Iraq, Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Jordan, the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, UAE, UK, USA vs. Islamic State (IS)	Government	2004/2004	War	↘
Lebanon	Government of Lebanon vs. Islamic State (IS)	Territory ('Islamic State')	2014/2014	Minor	↘
Syria	Governments of Syria, Iran, Russia vs. Syrian insurgents	Government	2011/2011	War	..
Syria	Governments of Syria, Iran, Russia vs. Islamic State (IS)	Territory ('Islamic State')	2013/2013	War	..
Syria	Government of Syria vs. Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat (PYD, Democratic Union Party)	Territory (Government/'Rojava Kurdistan')	2012/2015	Minor	n.a.
Turkey (Turkey, Iraq)	Government of Turkey vs. Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (PKK, Kurdistan Workers' Party)	Territory ('Kurdistan')	1983/1984	Minor	n.a.
Yemen	Government of Yemen vs. Ansarallah	Government	2014/2014	Minor	↘
	vs. al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)		2009/2009	Minor	↘
	vs. Forces of Hadi, Saudi-led coalition <sup>h</sup>		2015/2015	War	n.a.
Yemen	Government of Yemen vs. Islamic State (IS)	Territory ('Islamic State')	2015/2015	Minor	n.a.

MINUSMA = United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali; AMISOM = African Union Mission to Somalia.

*Note:* The conflicts in the table are listed by location, in alphabetical order, within 5 geographical regions: Africa, excluding Egypt; the Americas, which includes North, Central and South America and the Caribbean; Asia, which includes Oceania, Australia and New Zealand; Europe, including the Caucasus; and the Middle East, including Egypt.

<sup>a</sup> Location refers to the state where the government is being challenged by an opposition organization. If fighting took place elsewhere, all the countries where fighting took place are listed in brackets. The location name appears once for each conflict in the location. There can only be 1 conflict over government and 1 conflict over a specific territory in a given location.

<sup>b</sup> The government party and its allies are listed first, followed by the opposition parties, which may be organizations or other states. An opposition organization is any non-governmental group that has publicly announced its political goals and a name for itself and has used armed force to achieve its goals. Only those parties and alliances that were active in 2015 are listed in this column. A comma between 2 warring parties indicates an alliance. In cases where 2 governments have both stated incompatible positions, for example over a shared border, they are listed in alphabetical order.

<sup>c</sup> The stated general incompatible positions, 'government', 'territory' and 'government/territory', refer to contested incompatibilities concerning: (a) governmental power, such as type of political system or a change of central government or its composition; (b) territory, such as control of territory (interstate conflict), secession or autonomy; and (c) government and territory, which is a mix of the former two, where it is impossible to determine the primary incompatibility. A location may have incompatibilities over several different territories, but only 1 incompatibility over government.

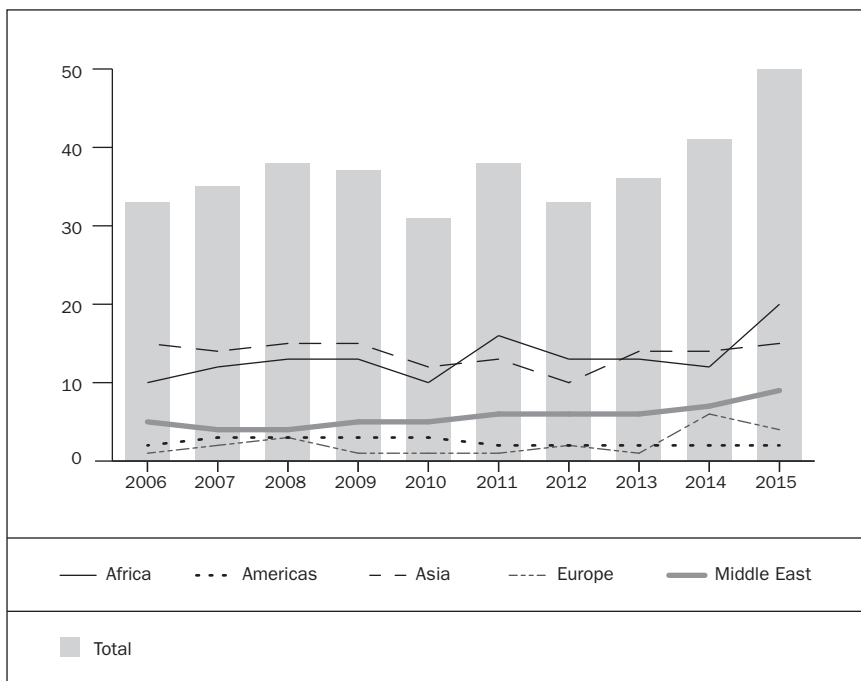
<sup>d</sup> Start year refers to the onset of a given dyad (the fighting between a government and a rebel group or another government). The first year given is when the first recorded battle-related death in the dyad occurred; the second year is the year when fighting caused at least 25 battle-related deaths for the first time.

<sup>e</sup> Change from 2014 indicates whether the number of battle-related deaths in 2015 was higher (arrow up ↗), lower (arrow down ↘) or the same (arrow flat →) compared to 2014. For dyads that were not active in 2014 the column entry reads 'n.a.'. In the case of Syria (.), fatality information cannot be broken down on a conflict-basis, since data for 2014 is only available at the aggregate, country-level.

<sup>f</sup> In 2015 MINUSMA was made up of troops from Armenia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Bhutan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Chad, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Czech Republic, Denmark, Djibouti, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Finland, France, Gambia, Germany, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Indonesia, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Latvia, Liberia, Madagascar, Mauritania, Nepal, the Netherlands, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sweden, Switzerland, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, the UK, the USA and Yemen. Note that France, in addition to contributing troops to MINUSMA, also deployed troops in the French-led counterterrorism Operation Barkhane.

<sup>g</sup> In 2015 AMISOM was made up of troops from Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Uganda.

<sup>h</sup> The Saudi-led coalition comprised armed forces from Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and the United Arab Emirates.



**Figure 6.1.** Distribution and total number of armed conflicts, by region 2006–15

in 2015, although it was lower than in 2014 when 29 per cent of the active conflicts were defined as wars.

Two of the wars listed in 2014 were no longer active in UCDP data in 2015 (Israel:Palestine and Ukraine:Donetsk), and one had de-escalated to the level of a minor armed conflict (South Sudan). One previously recorded conflict escalated to the level of a war in 2015 (Sudan) and one new conflict erupted at this high level of intensity (Nigeria:IS).

### Regional patterns

There were 20 conflicts recorded for Africa in 2015, the region with the highest total. Asia was the second-worst hit region, with 15 active conflicts, followed by the Middle East at nine, Europe at four and the Americas at two. The regional distribution of conflicts in the period 2006–15 is shown in table 6.4. Figure 6.1 presents the regional distribution of the total number of active conflicts for each year in the period.



In the 10-year period 2006–15, 35 conflicts were recorded for Africa, which is the highest number of all the regions.<sup>6</sup> Africa witnessed a marked increase in the number of conflicts between 2006, when there were 10 active conflicts, and 2015, when 20 were recorded, but no clear trend. An earlier peak of 16 was reached in 2011, and the remaining years have oscillated between 10 and 13. A striking pattern in the Africa region is the prominence of conflicts fought over government power. With 2015 as the only exception, governmental conflicts dominated every year, in some years making up 80 per cent of the total.

At 29, Asia saw the second highest total number of conflicts in the period 2006–15.<sup>7</sup> In 2015, there were 15 active conflicts, which is the same number recorded for the first year of the period, and also the peak throughout the 10 years. In the years in between the number fluctuated between 10 and 15. It is interesting to note that in stark contrast to Africa, a clear majority of Asian conflicts were fought over territory. This holds true for the total number during the period (22) and for all years, when territorial conflicts ranged between 58 per cent and 73 per cent of all conflicts. The main driver was the proliferation of territorial conflicts in India and Myanmar, which together experienced 14 such conflicts during this period.

Only three conflicts were recorded in the Americas in the period 2006–15, the lowest number of all regions. Two conflicts were active at the outset of the period and the same two were active in 2015 (USA and Colombia).<sup>8</sup> These two conflicts were recorded in every year of the period. The conflict between the Peruvian Government and the rebel group Sendero Luminoso was active between 2007 and 2010, increasing the number of active conflicts to three.

Nine conflicts were active in Europe during the period.<sup>9</sup> Only one conflict was active in 2006, and for the following seven years the number remained

<sup>6</sup> The 35 conflicts recorded for Africa in the period 2006–15 were Algeria; Angola: Cabinda; Burundi; Cameroon; Cameroon: 'Islamic State'; Central African Republic; Chad: 'Islamic State'; Côte d'Ivoire; Djibouti–Eritrea: Common border; DRC; DRC: 'Kongo Kingdom'; DRC: Katanga; Ethiopia: Ogaden; Ethiopia: Oromia; Kenya: Northeastern Province and Coast; Libya; Libya: 'Islamic State'; Mali; Mali: Azawad; Mali: 'Macina Empire'; Mauritania; Mozambique; Niger; Niger: 'Islamic State'; Nigeria; Nigeria: 'Islamic State'; Rwanda; Senegal: Casamance; Somalia; South Sudan; South Sudan–Sudan: Common border; Sudan; Sudan: Abyei; and Uganda. Note that when only the name of a country is given, this indicates a conflict over government. When a conflict is over territory, the name of the contested territory appears after the country name.

<sup>7</sup> The 29 conflicts recorded for Asia in the period 2006–15 were Afghanistan; Afghanistan: 'Islamic State'; Bangladesh; Cambodia–Thailand: Common border; China: East Turkestan; India; India: Assam; India: Bodoland; India: Garoland; India: 'Islamic State'; India: Manipur; India: Kashmir; India: 'Western South East Asia'; India–Pakistan: Kashmir; Malaysia: Sabah; Myanmar: Karen; Myanmar: Kachin; Myanmar: Kokang; Myanmar: Nagaland; Myanmar: Paulung; Myanmar: Shan; Nepal; Pakistan; Pakistan: Balochistan; Philippines; Philippines: Mindanao; Sri Lanka: Eelam; Tajikistan; and Thailand: Patani.

<sup>8</sup> This is the conflict between the US Government and al-Qaeda.

<sup>9</sup> The 9 conflicts recorded for Europe in the period 2006–15 were Azerbaijan: Nagorno-Karabakh; Georgia: South Ossetia; Russia: 'Caucasus Emirate'; Russia: Chechnya; Russia: 'Islamic State'; Ukraine; Ukraine: Donetsk; Ukraine: Lugansk; and Ukraine: 'Novorossiya'.

**Table 6.4.** Number of armed conflicts, by region, type and intensity, 2006–15

Region	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<i>Africa</i>										
<b>Type</b>										
G	8	7	8	9	8	12	9	10	9	10
T	2	5	5	4	2	4	4	3	3	10
G/T	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Intensity</b>										
Minor	8	11	12	11	8	13	11	11	9	16
War	2	1	1	2	2	3	2	2	3	4
<i>Americas</i>										
<b>Type</b>										
G	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2
T	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
G/T	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Intensity</b>										
Minor	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2
War	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Asia</i>										
<b>Type</b>										
G	5	4	4	4	5	5	4	4	4	4
T	10	10	11	11	7	8	6	10	10	11
G/T	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Intensity</b>										
Minor	13	12	12	12	10	11	8	12	12	13
War	2	2	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2
<i>Europe</i>										
<b>Type</b>										
G	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
T	1	2	3	1	1	1	2	1	5	4
G/T	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Intensity</b>										
Minor	1	2	3	1	1	1	2	1	4	3
War	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1
<i>Middle East</i>										
<b>Type</b>										
G	2	2	2	3	3	4	3	3	4	3
T	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	5
G/T	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1
<b>Intensity</b>										
Minor	4	3	2	3	4	5	4	4	2	5
War	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	2	5	4
<b>Total Type</b>										
G	17	16	17	19	19	23	18	19	20	19
T	16	19	21	18	12	15	14	16	21	30
G/T	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Total Intensity</b>										
Minor	28	31	32	30	26	32	27	30	29	39
War	5	4	6	7	5	6	6	6	12	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>50</b>

G = Government; T = Territory; G/T = Government and territory.

between one and three. There was a sharp increase in 2014, however, when the number went from one to six, mainly because of developments in Ukraine. It decreased to four in 2015.

In the Middle East, 13 conflicts were active between 2006 and 2015.<sup>10</sup> There was a clear, albeit uneven increase in the annual number of conflicts in the region, from five in 2006 to nine in 2015. Middle East conflicts made up a large proportion of the wars in 2014 and 2015: 42 per cent of all wars were fought in this region in 2014 and 36 per cent in 2015.

## Changes in the table of conflicts for 2015

### *New conflicts relating to Islamic State*

Of the 12 new conflicts added to the table in 2015, nine were linked to the expanded activities of IS. IS-leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced the establishment of a ‘caliphate’ in parts of Syria and Iraq in July 2014, demanded the allegiance of all devout Muslims worldwide, and declared that IS would continue to seize land to expand its territory across the globe.<sup>11</sup> This led to two parallel developments: four new IS groups were launched; and two established Islamist groups pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi and, on acceptance, were integrated into the group. Subsequently, what had been a relatively limited phenomenon geographically in 2014—with conflicts registered against the Iraqi, Syrian and Lebanese governments—reached a new level in 2015.<sup>12</sup> IS was recorded in 12 armed conflicts in 2015, nine of which were new that year.<sup>13</sup>

The emergence of the first cluster of IS groups—those appearing as new entities in 2014 and 2015—is difficult to fully account for. Much of what takes place with regard to shifting allegiances and the movement of fight-

<sup>10</sup> The 13 conflicts recorded for the Middle East in the period 2006–15 were Egypt; Egypt: ‘Islamic State’; Israel: Palestine; Israel: southern Lebanon; Iran; Iraq; Lebanon: ‘Islamic State’; Syria; Syria: ‘Islamic State’; Syria: Government/Rojava Kurdistan; Turkey: ‘Kurdistan’; Yemen; and Yemen: ‘Islamic State’.

<sup>11</sup> Abu Mohammad al-Adnani al-Shami, ‘This is the promise of Allah’, 19 June 2014. On IS see also chapter 2, section II, in this volume.

<sup>12</sup> The UCDP defines different conflicts according to which incompatibility is being disputed by force. Hence, when a new group emerges and the incompatibility changes, a new conflict is recorded. An example of a similar situation in previous years is that of Chechnya. UCDP recorded an intrastate conflict over Chechnya fought between the Russian Government and the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (ChRI) between 1994 and 2007. In the mid-2000s the conflict spread to large parts of the North Caucasus and radical Islamists gained influence. This development led to the official abolition of the ChRI and its replacement with the Caucasus Emirate by the ChRI leader, Doku Umarov, in 2007. The territorial incompatibility over Chechnya was therefore terminated and replaced with a new conflict over territory, the ‘Caucasus Emirate’, which spanned Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Ossetia, Karachay-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria.

<sup>13</sup> The 9 new conflicts involving IS were those with the governments of Afghanistan, Libya, Russia, Yemen, Cameroon, Chad, Egypt, Niger and Nigeria. In the first 4, new groups emerged to create new IS branches; in the latter 5, organizations that had previously been actively fighting transformed into IS wilayahs.

ers between different groups is shrouded in secrecy. Hence, the timing and details of events often remain unclear. However, in all four cases, it appears that the new IS branches were set up as a result of a combination of conscious efforts by core-IS groups, the switching of loyalty by powerful commanders and recruitment of fighters from already established groups. This is illustrated by the example of the emergence of IS in Afghanistan. It seems that around 70 IS fighters from Iraq and Syria, who now form the nucleus of the IS wing in the country, arrived in Afghanistan some time in 2014. Local commanders in the area joined them and six former Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) leaders pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi in January 2015. Subsequently, an IS statement announced the creation of Wilayah Khorasan, a new IS province in the Afghan-Pakistani border area.<sup>14</sup>

The emergence of the second cluster of new IS groups—those which had previously functioned as separate entities with their own goals and structures—is more straightforward. Both Boko Haram, active in conflicts over government power in Nigeria and Cameroon, and Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, which previously fought to oust the secular government in Cairo, transformed into IS wings by pledging their allegiance and being accepted by al-Baghdadi. When Boko Haram became the West African wing of IS, its conflict with the Nigerian and Cameroonian governments over government power was recorded as terminated by UCDP, and four new territorial conflicts commenced in which IS was fighting four neighbouring states to incorporate them into the so-called caliphate. The same applies to Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, which changed its goals to aim for the inclusion of Sinai into the future caliphate.

#### *Other new conflicts*

Three other conflicts were added to table 6.3 in 2015: India: Western South East Asia; Kenya: North-Eastern and Coast provinces; and Mali: ‘Macina Empire’. North-east India has been the scene of numerous territorial conflicts with different rebel groups since the 1980s. The separatists have suffered substantial setbacks in recent years, in part driven by the increased fragmentation within rebel ranks. Many of the resulting splinter groups have abandoned fighting and signed ceasefire agreements with the Indian Government. In a bid to enhance consolidation, the leaders of four insurgent groups fighting in four different conflicts signed a joint declaration

<sup>14</sup> Roul, A., ‘Wilayat Khurasan: Islamic State consolidates position in AfPak region’, *Terrorism Monitor*, vol. 13, no. 7 (Apr. 2015); Abu Mohammad al-Adnani al-Shami, Address by the spokesman for the Islamic State, ‘Say “die in your rage!”’, 26 Jan. 2015; Craig, T. and Khan, H., ‘Pakistani Taliban leaders pledge allegiance to Islamic State’, *Washington Post*, 14 Oct. 2014; and United Nations, Security Council, ‘Sixth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2160 (2014) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan’, S/2015/648, 26 Aug. 2015.

establishing the United National Liberation Front of Western South East Asia (UNLFW) in April 2015.<sup>15</sup> This is a new territorial conflict since the UNLFW's territorial claim to 'Western South East Asia' incorporates the previous incompatibilities of its constituent groups. Shortly after the formation of the group, UNLFW was involved in some of the heaviest fighting of the past five years. In a planned and highly coordinated attack, UNLFW forces ambushed a convoy of Indian soldiers on 4 June, killing 18. This triggered a strong Indian response, resulting in the deaths of 100 UNLFW fighters when the Indian army attacked a number of UNLFW camps inside Myanmar.<sup>16</sup>

A new conflict began in Kenya in 2015. In response to Kenya's military involvement in neighbouring Somalia, the Somali Islamist group al-Shabab has gradually increased its activities inside Kenya, initially portraying it as retaliation. However, in March 2015 al-Shabab publicly stated that it was seeking to 'liberate the Muslim Lands of Northeastern Province and the Coast from Kenyan occupation', thereby initiating a new, territorial conflict with the Kenyan Government.<sup>17</sup> This move has partly been interpreted as a way of strengthening support and recruitment among Kenyan Muslims in the north-east and along the coast, many of whom have long-standing grievances against the Kenyan state. Fighting in the conflict mainly took the form of al-Shabab attacks on military installations or convoys, accompanied by the group carrying out massacres of civilians, and army operations to flush out al-Shabab from different areas.

Three conflicts were recorded in Mali in 2015, one of which was new. The Front de Libération du Macina (FLM, Macina Liberation Front) first emerged in January, when it carried out attacks mainly in the Mopti region in the centre of the country. Ostensibly led by a radical Islamist preacher, Amadou Kufa, the group's ideology draws on the narrative of reviving the 19th century Fulani-led Macina Empire, a theocratic caliphate which existed in what is now Mali.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The four groups were the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang faction (NSCN-K), the Independent faction of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA-I), the Kamatapur Liberation Organization (KLO) and the Songbijit faction of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB-S). *Times of Assam*, 'ULFA[I], NDFB, NSCN & KLO unite as UNLFW', 4 May 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Kalita, P., 'UNLFW: the new name for terror in NE', *Times of India*, 5 June 2015; and South Asian Terrorism Portal, 'Manipur Timeline, 2015' [n.d.], <[http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/manipur/timeline/year\\_2015.htm](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/manipur/timeline/year_2015.htm)>.

<sup>17</sup> Harakat Al-Mujahideen Press Office, Statement on Garissa University College Attack, 4 Apr. 2015, cited in Bryden, M., 'The Decline and Fall of Al-Shabaab? Think Again', Sahan (Apr. 2015).

<sup>18</sup> On the conflict in Mali, see also chapter 5 in this volume.

*Restarted conflicts*

Six conflicts restarted in 2015, having been recorded as inactive in UCDP data for a year or more: Burundi; Cameroon; Ethiopia: Oromia; Myanmar: Shan; Syria: Government/'Rojava Kurdistan'; and Turkey: 'Kurdistan'.

In Burundi, the conflict over government power was last active in 2008. After years of political violence, killings carried out by unknown perpetrators and clashes between the security forces and gunmen, two distinct groups emerged in 2015. First, amid violent protests after President Pierre Nkurunziza announced that he would be seeking a third term in office, even though the constitution stipulates a maximum of two, a faction of the army attempted to stage a coup on 13 May while the president was out of the country. A prominent Burundi army officer, Godefroid Niyombare, announced that he was dismissing the president. There was fierce fighting in the capital as the two sides struggled for control of the airport and the state radio and television broadcaster. By 15 May, the coup had collapsed and forces loyal to Nkurunziza appeared to be back in full control. A new bout of fighting broke out in July, however, just before the controversial elections. In December, a new group, Les Forces Republicaines du Burundi (Forebu, Republican Forces of Burundi), announced that it would fight to 'drive out Nkurunziza by force to restore the Arusha accord and democracy'.<sup>19</sup> Forebu claimed responsibility for attacks on three military installations earlier in the month, which had claimed at least 87 lives.

In 1984 an attempted coup in Cameroon led to at least 70 fatalities. No further conflict over government had been recorded in the country until 2015, when a new phase of the conflict began, albeit involving a different group.<sup>20</sup> In January Boko Haram released a video in which it demanded that Cameroon scrap its constitution and embrace Islam. The Cameroonian Government had been fighting the group for over a year, but this was in the context of neighbouring Nigeria's conflict. There were several battles in the northern part of the country over the following two months, and troops from Chad supported the government.

The conflict between the Ethiopian Government and the Oromo separatist rebel group, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), has been ongoing at a low level almost without interruption since 1977. After a year of reduced conflict activity in 2014, the conflict once more became active in 2015.

In Myanmar, a broad peace process involving a large number of armed groups has been ongoing since 2011. In 2014 bilateral ceasefire agreements between the government and Shan rebel groups meant that the conflict fell

<sup>19</sup> 'Burundi rebels announce force to oust president', Agence France-Presse, 23 Dec. 2015.

<sup>20</sup> A location may have incompatibilities over several different territories, but only one incompatibility over government. Hence, all groups fighting in an incompatibility over government are listed in the same conflict.

below the 25 battle-related deaths threshold. Fighting resumed in 2015, however, after one of the Shan rebel groups—Shan State Progress Party (SSPP), or Shan State Army (North)—refused to sign the Nationwide Cease-fire Agreement on 15 October.<sup>21</sup>

Syria was the country hardest hit by conflict in 2015, as it was in the preceding year.<sup>22</sup> In addition to the conflict fought over government power, which had the highest death toll, and the one over IS's territorial claim, a third conflict became active in 2015, fought between the government and the Kurdish rebel group *Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat* (PYD, the Democratic Union Party).<sup>23</sup> The conflict, which had previously been active in 2012 and 2013, concerns both government and territory since the PYD has issued several statements demanding both systemic change in the whole country, with the aim of installing a democratic government, and autonomy for 'Rojava Kurdistan', which is the northern-most part of Syria. In 2014 there had been very little fighting between the two, as both focused on fighting IS, a fight in which they were tactical allies. However, major clashes erupted in the north-eastern city of Hasakah in January 2015, which broke a long-standing truce between the PYD and government-allied forces. More than 50 people were killed in fighting that many believe was triggered by a dispute over the placement of a checkpoint.<sup>24</sup>

The conflict between the Turkish Government and the *Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan* (PKK, Kurdistan Worker's Party), which began in 1983, had seen a lull in 2014 following a March 2013 ceasefire agreement. However, tensions built due to a number of factors, most notably a stalled peace process, domestic political developments as a result of electoral gains by the pro-Kurdish HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party) and the perception among Kurds that Turkey was doing too little to prevent IS attacks on Kurdish civilians in Syria and in Turkey. The ceasefire was abandoned in July 2015, immediately after an IS suicide bomb in Suruc killed 33 people, triggering PKK attacks and a subsequent Turkish offensive. The conflict quickly escalated to a level not seen since the 1990s.<sup>25</sup>

### *Conflicts no longer active*

Nine conflicts were removed from the table in 2015: the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC); DRC: Katanga; Egypt; India: Bodoland; India: Garoland; Israel: Palestine; Ukraine; Ukraine: Donetsk and Ukraine: Lugansk.

<sup>21</sup> Fisher, J., 'Shan villagers feel force of Burmese army anger', BBC News, 29 Jan. 2016; and Nang Seng Nom, 'Two girls dead after landmine blast in Shan state village', The Irrawaddy, 17 Nov. 2015.

<sup>22</sup> On the conflict in Syria, see chapter 4, section II, in this volume.

<sup>23</sup> On the role of the Kurds in the Syria conflict, see chapter 2, section IV, in this volume.

<sup>24</sup> Lund, A., 'What's behind the Kurdish-Arab clashes in East Syria?', Syria in Crisis, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 23 Jan. 2015.

<sup>25</sup> On Kurdish politics in Turkey, see chapter 2, section IV, in this volume.

The conflict fought over government power in the DRC de-escalated in 2015 and did not reach the threshold for inclusion. The Government had defeated the major threat against it—the March 23 Movement—in November 2013. Focus then shifted to smaller rebel groups. Alliance des patriotes pour un Congo libre et souverain (APCLS, Alliance of the People for a Free and Sovereign Congo), which was founded in 2008 and had at times fought alongside the Government and at times against it, was targeted throughout 2014. There was also fighting between the Government and another small group, Parti pour l'action et la reconstruction du Congo-Forces armées alléluia (PARC-FAAL, Party for Action and the Reconstruction of the Congo-Allelujah Armed Forces). Both groups were weakened during the clashes and did not meet the threshold for inclusion in 2015.

The territorial conflict over Katanga in the DRC also de-escalated in 2015. The Government had seized the headquarters of its opponents, the separatist group Kata Katanga, in 2014, forcing them to withdraw south in the direction of Lubumbashi and the Kundelungu and Upemba national parks. A few clashes were reported in 2015, but the group was scattered and the level of violence low.

In the wake of the Arab Spring in 2011, a number of different jihadist groups strengthened their positions in the Sinai Peninsula. The security forces and Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis clashed frequently in 2014, causing the conflict to become active in UCDP data. In November the group pledged allegiance to IS and al-Baghdadi, and changed its goal from government power to fighting for the inclusion of the Sinai Peninsula in the caliphate. Once the pledge was accepted, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis ceased to exist and became part of IS as Wilayah Sinai.

The territorial conflict over Bodoland in north-east India was not active in 2015. The Songbijit faction of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB-S) was one of the four founding member organizations of UNLFW (see above). The new group changed its aims and focus to a wider territory, thereby ending the conflict over Bodoland.

The territorial conflict over Garoland, fought between the Indian Government and the Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA), was also inactive in 2015. There has been persistent but low-intensity fighting since the group was founded in 2010 and the conflict has hovered around the 25 battle-related deaths threshold, falling beneath it in 2015.

The conflict in Israel, fought over the Palestinian territories, reached its highest level of intensity since the early 1980s in 2014. After two months of almost daily attacks, a ceasefire was agreed in August that year. The ceasefire was respected throughout 2015 and although violence continued the conflict did not cross the threshold for inclusion.

The conflict over government power in Ukraine, which pitted the Government of Ukraine against the strongly organized pro-West protest movement,



Maidan, was played out during the first two months of 2014. The Maidan protest movement acquired an armed wing that fought the security forces. On 22 February, under substantial foreign pressure and faced with the unwillingness of the armed forces to escalate the situation, a large part of the government defected to the side of the protesters, triggering the removal and departure for Russia of President Viktor Yanukovich. With Maidan's victory a new cabinet was installed and no further fighting took place in the conflict.<sup>26</sup>

Maidan's victory ended the conflict over government at the end of February 2014 but also initiated three territorial conflicts as pro-Russian, anti-Maidan movements emerged in the east of the country. One of these, the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), claimed sovereignty over Donetsk Oblast and declared independence for the region in April 2014. In the following five months fierce fighting reached the level of war. A second territorial conflict was fought over the Luhansk/Lugansk Oblast when the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) also declared independence in April 2014. The conflict involved large-scale military offensives by both sides over several months. In September 2014 the DPR and the LPR created a unified group (United Forces of Novorossiia) and changed their incompatibility to the new territory, encompassing much larger swathes of land. The conflicts over Donetsk and Lugansk were therefore terminated but the conflict over Novorossiia continued into 2015.<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusions

There was a major increase in the number of armed conflicts in the three years to 2015: from 33 in 2012 to 50 in 2015. The number of conflicts in 2015 was the highest since the tumultuous years in the immediate aftermath of the cold war. This reflects two major trends: first, some parts of the world, especially the Middle East, have become much more violent, and the conflicts in Iraq–Syria caused the overwhelming majority of the battle-related deaths. Second, IS has expanded its area of operations and declared new provinces of its caliphate centred on Raqqa in Syria. Armed groups that have pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi now claim territories by force in 12 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East.

The escalating conflicts in many parts of the world have undeniably had highly destructive consequences, leading to violent spillover effects in other parts of the world and the highest number of forcibly displaced persons ever

<sup>26</sup> See Anthony, I., Perlo-Freeman, S. and Wezeman, S. T., 'The Ukraine conflict and its implications', *SIPRI Yearbook 2015*, pp. 55–74.

<sup>27</sup> On the conflict in Ukraine, see chapter 4, section III, in this volume.

recorded.<sup>28</sup> There are media reports of shocking cruelty, and governments and communities are rightly concerned. Nonetheless, it is still true to say that the levels of violence linked to armed conflict remain much lower than they were during the so-called second cold war in the 1980s, when enormously destructive wars raged in Afghanistan, Iran–Iraq, Mozambique and Lebanon, to name but a few. The decades before that witnessed even larger wars, most notably the highly lethal conflicts in Viet Nam and Korea. In addition, numerous acts of genocide took place during the cold war, making the decades of the cold war much more violent than recent years.<sup>29</sup> It is important to keep in mind that the international community has developed an admittedly limited but nonetheless genuine capacity to deal with the challenges of armed conflict, in the form of mediation, peacekeeping, conflict-sensitive development cooperation and other forms of peace-promotion and engagement. This capacity must not be overlooked or deprecated. It is more important than ever to keep learning from previous successes so that intensified efforts can be made to respond to the current increase in armed conflict.

The expansion of the violent struggle to establish new provinces for IS is a significant political phenomenon that is reflected in the UCDP data. For the countries and populations concerned this represents a serious direct challenge to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state, and to the safety and freedom of many millions of people. The transnational dimensions of this peculiar cluster of conflicts, and the great potential for further expansion, mean that IS looms as a key security concern across continents. Nonetheless, it is not necessarily the case that levels of violence are rising in tandem with the increase in the number of territorial incompatibilities linked to IS. As explained above, in Nigeria an existing violent conflict already registered in UCDP was replaced by the new territorial conflict linked to IS. The incompatibility is new but the organization doing the fighting is more or less unchanged. In the case of the Caucasus Emirate in Russia, the group fighting an existing conflict was militarily weakened, so parts of it shifted allegiance to create a new IS wing, leading to a new territorial incompatibility against Russia. Hence, while a dangerous new conflict was registered in Russia in 2015, another violent conflict apparently lost much of its potency in an interrelated development. Similarly, the restarted conflict over government power in Cameroon came about when Boko Haram stated an incompatibility with the Government of Cameroon. Since the armed forces of Cameroon were already fighting the group as part of the incompatibility over government power in Nigeria, this was an important political

<sup>28</sup> UNHCR, *Mid-Year Trends 2015* (UNHCR: 2015).

<sup>29</sup> See Melander, E., 'Organized violence in the world 2015: an assessment by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program', UCDP Paper no. 9, [n.d.].

move but did not necessarily entail a change in the pattern of fighting. Similar observations and arguments can be made about most of the new conflicts involving IS in 2015.

The pledges of allegiance to IS by numerous armed groups, and the declaration of new ‘provinces of the caliphate’, are serious and worrying events in their own right, but it is too early to tell whether this development will translate into substantially worse levels of violence. The characteristics of the conflicts are shifting, as are their political ramifications, but this is not necessarily true of the war fighting on the ground. One development to take into account is the outbreak of fighting between groups loyal to IS and other, pre-existing Islamist groups, which has happened in Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and Yemen. Such fighting could replace fighting against government forces, in such a way that the total level of fighting remains about the same. Alternatively, the inter-group fighting could result in escalated violence. These will be important trends to follow closely.