

2. Armed conflict and peace processes

Overview

This chapter describes developments in 2018 in armed conflicts and peace processes. It is structured regionally (the Americas, Asia and Oceania, Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa). Key examples are discussed based on academic and technical publications, news reports and conflict-related databases. The chapter does not cover all organized armed violence and largely excludes criminal violence, the main exception being some events in the Americas, discussed in section II.

Section I explores definitions and some of the main features and consequences of armed conflict in 2018. Many contemporary armed conflicts tend to be fought primarily in urban areas and affect civilians, and in 2018, when explosive weapons were used in populated areas, over 90 per cent of the total casualties were civilians. The number of forcibly displaced people worldwide at the beginning of 2018 was 68.5 million (including more than 25 million refugees). Protracted displacement crises continued in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

In the Americas (section II), implementation of the peace process in Colombia persisted but ran into a series of problems in 2018. Despite this being the only country with active armed conflicts in the region, insecurity and instability remained pervasive due to the presence of organized criminal gangs and non-state armed groups in many countries in Central and South America. Political unrest and violence occurred in Nicaragua, while in Venezuela a growing humanitarian crisis, including a large outflux of refugees, raised concerns about regional destabilization. Economic problems and endemic crime and corruption contributed to deteriorating levels of confidence in democracy.

There were seven countries with active armed conflicts in Asia and Oceania (section III) in 2018: Afghanistan, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines and Thailand. The three most virulent armed conflicts were in Afghanistan, Myanmar and the Philippines. The war in Afghanistan was the world's most lethal armed conflict in 2018 with more than 43 000 combatants and civilians killed. Despite some promising developments in the various peace processes, at the end of the year, the conflict parties were as divided as ever, violence on the ground was rising, and regional and international powers held divergent positions. Two emerging regional trends were (a) growing violence from identity politics, based on ethnic and/or religious polarization; and (b) increases in transnational violent jihadist groups, including an Islamic State

presence in Afghanistan, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and the Philippines. Sexual and gender-based violence was also widespread, but often underreported. Two key peace developments in 2018 were the peace process on the Korean peninsula and the reinstatement of the truce between India and Pakistan in their interstate armed conflict over Kashmir.

One armed conflict was active in Europe (section IV) in 2018—in Ukraine—and aside from a number of temporary ceasefires, very little progress was made in the peace process. Elsewhere in Europe, tensions remain linked to unresolved conflicts, especially those in the post-Soviet space, and in highly militarized and contested security contexts such as the Black Sea region.

There were seven countries with active armed conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa (section V) in 2018: Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Libya, Syria, Turkey and Yemen. Many of these conflicts were interconnected and involved regional and international powers as well as numerous non-state actors. In addition to these armed conflicts, three cross-cutting issues shaped the region's security dilemmas in 2018: (a) regional interstate rivalries with a shifting network of external alliances and interests, (b) continuing threats from violent jihadist groups, and (c) increasing competition over water and the growing impact of climate change.

Iraq in 2018 was largely emerging into a post-conflict period but remained a fragile country with weak state institutions. The ongoing armed conflict and civil unrest between Israel and Hamas and other Palestinian organizations in Gaza rose to its highest level since the 2014 Israel–Gaza War. While the Syrian civil war was far from over, 2018 saw a clear de-escalation due to the Syrian Government's consolidation of territorial control and the near-defeat of the Islamic State. In Yemen, humanitarian conditions worsened in 2018 as a stop-start fight for the port city of Hodeidah ensued and the United Nations sought to mediate a ceasefire. The Stockholm Agreement between the Houthis and the Yemeni Government at the end of the year offered cause for optimism, although significant differences remained to be bridged in follow-on talks.

Eleven countries had active armed conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa (section VI) in 2018: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the CAR, the DRC, Ethiopia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan. Many of these conflicts overlapped across states and regions, as a result of the transnational activities of violent Islamist groups, other armed groups and criminal networks, and were linked to extreme poverty, poor governance, economic fragility and low resilience. Three cross-cutting issues also shaped the region in 2018: (a) the continuing internationalization of counterterrorism activities in Africa; (b) changes in the scale and frequency of election-related violence; and (c) water scarcity and the growing impact of climate change. A peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea in July 2018 was a potential game-changer in the Horn of Africa.