

V. Armed conflict and peace processes in the Middle East and North Africa

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There were seven countries with active armed conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa in 2018: Egypt (high-intensity, subnational armed conflict), Iraq (internationalized civil war), Israel (low-intensity, extrastate armed conflict), Libya (internationalized civil war), Syria (major internationalized civil war), Turkey (high-intensity, extrastate and subnational armed conflict) and Yemen (major internationalized civil war).¹ Many of these conflicts were interconnected and involved regional and international powers as well as numerous non-state actors.² The conflicts have killed hundreds of thousands of people and displaced millions more. Security dilemmas—which occur when states attempt to increase their own security but trigger countermeasures that leave them even less secure—overwhelmed the region in 2018, shaped by three cross-cutting issues: (a) ongoing 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 growing climate-change impacts.³ This section first briefly examines these three issues, and then describes developments in each of the armed conflicts and any related peace processes in 2018.

Key general developments

The cumulative impact of armed conflict in the Middle East today is staggering. At least 400 000 people have been killed in the Syrian civil war, which since 2011 has also generated over 5.6 million refugees and 6.6 million internally displaced people.⁴ In Iraq, the liberation of territories from the Islamic State came at great human and infrastructural cost. The civil war in Yemen has left much of the population at risk of starvation and disease. Libya remains a failed state. Even relatively stable states, such as Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, are wrestling with socio-economic problems, youth protests

¹ For conflict definitions and typologies, see section I in this chapter.

² Hiltermann, J., *Tackling the MENA Region's Intersecting Conflicts* (International Crisis Group: Brussels, 22 Dec. 2017).

³ On security dilemmas, see e.g. Tang, S., 'The security dilemma: A conceptual analysis', *Security Studies*, vol. 18, no. 3 (2009), pp. 587–623. On definitions of jihadism, see 'What is jihadism?', BBC News, 11 Dec. 2014.

⁴ UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 'Syria emergency', [n.d.]. There are no exact casualty figures for Syria—see Specia, M., 'How Syria's death toll is lost in the fog of war', *New York Times*, 13 Apr. 2018.

and conflict spillover from unstable neighbours.⁵ In practically every country in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the economic and political challenges that resulted in the Arab Spring were more intense in 2018 than they were seven years before.⁶

Shifting alliances and rivalries

The most destabilizing and high-risk interstate rivalries in the MENA region in 2018 continued to be between Iran and an ad-hoc group of four states—Israel, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the United States—that share a common view of Iran as a destabilizing force with aspirations of becoming the regional hegemon. These four countries are committed to challenging and rolling back Iranian influence in the region. Within Iran, the perception of the regional challenges and causes of insecurity are very different. Since the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Iran has been surrounded by hostile powers and has responded with a ‘forward defence’ strategy—the use of regional allies and proxies as leverage to deter or fight Iran’s adversaries away from Iranian territory—that has evolved over time, partly in reaction to the behaviour of external actors. Today, the defence strategy is carried out by Iranian forces or proxies in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen.⁷ The power struggle between Iran and the anti-Iran group was played out in a number of ways in 2018.

For the USA, it translated into withdrawal from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal in May, reinstatement of sanctions (including secondary sanctions against countries engaged in business with Iran), more forceful rhetoric and threats of military action.⁸ The USA has also been pushing for a new Sunni Muslim security and political alliance in the region—tentatively called the Middle East Strategic Alliance, but often referred to as the ‘Arab NATO’ (comparing it to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization)—in order to counter Iran’s expanding influence. The USA hoped that this nascent security alliance, under the de facto leadership of Saudi Arabia, would include the six Gulf Cooperation Council states (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE) and Egypt and Jordan. However, the ongoing Saudi Arabian-led

⁵ Graham-Harrison, E., ‘Anger that drove the Arab Spring is flaring again’, *The Guardian*, 21 Jan. 2018; and International Crisis Group (ICG), *Restoring Public Confidence in Tunisia’s Political System*, Middle East and North Africa Briefing no. 62 (ICG: Brussels, 2 Aug. 2018).

⁶ On the impending challenges of reconstruction, repatriation and reconciliation in the region, see Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS) and Carnegie Middle East Center, *The Politics of Post-Conflict Reconstruction*, Sep. 2018.

⁷ International Crisis Group (ICG), *Iran’s Priorities in a Turbulent Middle East*, Middle East Report no. 184 (ICG: Brussels, 13 Apr. 2018); and Ahmadian, H., ‘Iran and Saudi Arabia in the Age of Trump’, *Survival*, vol. 60, no. 2 (2018), pp. 133–150.

⁸ On the US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, see chapter 7, section III, in this volume. Ramzy, A., ‘Trump threatens Iran on Twitter warning Rouhani of dire “consequences”’, *New York Times*, 22 July 2018; and Dages, H., ‘Second wave of resumed Iran sanctions target banks, petroleum, shipping’, Atlantic Council, 26 Oct. 2018.

blockade of Qatar remains a major obstacle—not least because this intra-Gulf rift has driven Qatar into partnership with Iran. Oman also seems unlikely to join.⁹ Nonetheless, in October, Bahrain's Foreign Minister, Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, announced that the proposed alliance would be formed the following year.¹⁰

Saudi Arabia—the country with the highest levels of military spending and arms imports in the region—and the UAE (and to a lesser extent some of the other Gulf states) are already actively opposing Iran in Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen.¹¹ In 2016, for example, Saudi Arabia reopened diplomatic relations with Iraq (which were cut in 1990 following President Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait), and engagement has intensified since then in an attempt to counter Iranian influence.¹²

Israeli opposition to Iran is focused on Lebanon and Syria. Israel attacked Iranian and Iranian-aligned targets in Syria on several occasions in 2018 and threatened to target Iranian-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon.¹³ In the legislative elections in Lebanon in May 2018, the first since 2009, parties allied with Hezbollah increased their share of seats from roughly 44 per cent to 53 per cent.¹⁴ Hezbollah is an explicit part of Iran's forward defence strategy, and the group's political primacy and military power—it deploys a militia outside the national Lebanese military chain of command, with capabilities much stronger than those of the Lebanese armed forces—effectively places Iran (and a sizeable stockpile of rockets and missiles) on Israel's border.¹⁵

Iran's main strategy in 2018 was to seek to consolidate its influence in the region, especially in north-eastern Syria and in improved relations with Qatar and Turkey. It did so largely by continuing with its forward defence

⁹ The blockade against Qatar commenced in 2017; see Davis, I., 'Armed conflict in the Middle East and North Africa', *SIPRI Yearbook 2018*, pp. 66–67. Al Jazeera, 'US plans to revive "Arab NATO" to confront Iran', 28 July 2018; and Pradhan, P. K., 'Qatar crisis and the deepening regional faultlines', *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 42, no. 4 (2018), pp. 437–442.

¹⁰ Al Jazeera, 'Bahrain says "Arab NATO" to be formed by next year', 27 Oct. 2018; *The Economist*, 'A new Arab military alliance has dim prospects', 6 Oct. 2018; and Helou, A., 'What's standing in the way of an Arab NATO?', *Defense News*, 20 Nov. 2018.

¹¹ Ehteshami, A., 'Saudi Arabia as a resurgent regional power', *International Spectator*, vol. 53, no. 4 (2018), pp. 75–94; and Wezeman, P., 'Saudi Arabia, armaments and conflict in the Middle East', SIPRI Commentary, 14 Dec. 2018.

¹² International Crisis Group (ICG), *Saudi Arabia: Back to Baghdad*, Middle East Report no. 186 (ICG: Brussels, 22 May 2018).

¹³ International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), 'Rising Israeli–Iranian tensions', *Strategic Comments*, vol. 24, no. 3 (May 2018), pp. vii–viii; International Crisis Group (ICG), 'Israel, Hizbollah and Iran: Preventing another war in Syria', Middle East Report no. 182 (ICG: Brussels, 8 Feb. 2018); and Lappin, Y., 'Through rapid raids, IDF's special forces to play critical role in future war with Hezbollah', *J-Wire*, 9 Dec. 2018.

¹⁴ Humud, C. E., 'Lebanon's 2018 elections', Congressional Research Service (CRS) Insight, 11 May 2018; and Wimmen, H., 'In Lebanon's elections, more of the same is mostly good news', Commentary, International Crisis Group, 9 May 2018.

¹⁵ International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), 'Lebanon's interlocking challenges', *Strategic Comments*, vol. 24, no. 25 (Aug. 2018). On the UN's peace mission in Lebanon, see chapter 3, section II, in this volume.

strategy at a level presumably designed to avoid a more punitive reaction from its rivals. Thus, Iran resumed some limited missile testing and signed a maritime security agreement with Qatar in April 2018.¹⁶ According to US claims, Iran also used its Shiite proxies in Iraq to threaten the US consulate.¹⁷

The risk of a more serious confrontation between Iran and members of the ad-hoc anti-Iran group was a constant source of tension during the year. An attack on a military parade in the Iranian city of Ahvaz on 22 September, which killed at least 25 people, raised tensions even further. Iran accused the USA of allying with an unspecified Gulf country to carry out the attack, which was claimed by both an Arab separatist group and the Islamic State.¹⁸

The anti-Iran group was not without its own tensions, especially between the USA and Saudi Arabia. The October assassination of a *Washington Post* columnist, Jamal Khashoggi, in the Saudi Arabian consulate in Istanbul not only amplified criticism in the US Congress and media of Saudi Arabian foreign policy and the US administration's seemingly unconditional support for it, but also damaged Saudi Arabia's political credibility more widely outside the region.¹⁹ Saudi Arabia, which already faced increased international criticism of its intervention in Yemen, was involved later in the year in a diplomatic confrontation with Canada over its human rights situation.²⁰

Finally, Turkey's realignment with Iran and Russia in 2018 was also important, as it rebalanced the scales in Syria against the USA and its Kurdish allies (see 'Armed conflict in Syria' below).

Violent jihadist groups

Despite battlefield defeats in Iraq and Syria, an estimated 100 000 to 230 000 Salafi jihadists—including those belonging to the Islamic State and al-Qaeda—were active in about 70 countries around the globe in 2018—as much as a fourfold increase in the number of fighters since 11 September 2001.²¹ These numbers have been criticized for conflating jihadism with other forms of Sunni Islamist militancy; also, while the numbers of fighters

¹⁶ Fars News, 'Iran, Qatar agree to increase sea patrols in Persian Gulf', 12 Apr. 2018; and Erästö, T., 'Dissecting international concerns about Iran's missiles', SIPRI Backgrounder, 15 Nov. 2018.

¹⁷ Gaouette, N., 'Pompeo threatens Iran over attacks on US in Iraq', CNN, 21 Sep. 2018.

¹⁸ *New York Times*, 'Iran's President condemns Gulf state, and US, after deadly attack', 23 Sep. 2018.

¹⁹ *The Economist*, 'The calculations of Muhammad bin Salman', 9 June 2018; and Chulov, M., 'Middle East: Saudi Arabia weakened as Iran plans to consolidate gains', *The Guardian*, 27 Dec. 2018.

²⁰ Cecco, L., 'Justin Trudeau says Canada is looking to pull out of Saudi arms deal', *The Guardian*, 17 Dec. 2018.

²¹ Jones, S., et al., *The Evolution of the Salafi-Jihadist Threat: Current and Future Challenges from the Islamic State, Al-Qaeda, and Other Groups*, Center for Strategic & International Studies, Nov. 2018. On the Islamic State, its goals, operations and affiliates, and the international military campaign to defeat it, see Davis, I., 'The aims, objectives and modus operandi of the Islamic State and the international response', *SIPRI Yearbook 2016*, pp. 22–39; and Davis, I., 'The Islamic State in 2016: A failing "caliphate" but a growing transnational threat?', *SIPRI Yearbook 2017*, pp. 89–104.

have increased, more of them are fighting locally.²² In the MENA region, the fight against these groups is far from over as they pivot from territorial collapse in strongholds like Syria and Iraq to a covert network estimated to number more than 20 000.²³ Assessing the size of their base is difficult given its covert nature and a continuing significant component of ‘foreign fighters’ (individuals that have joined an armed conflict abroad). However, the problems that gave rise to the Islamic State and al-Qaeda have not been addressed, and therefore the military victories against the groups are likely to provide only a temporary respite to the issue of Islamist militancy.

Conflict between the Islamic State and al-Qaeda also continued, especially in Egypt, Libya and Syria. On balance, al-Qaeda’s role in the region seemed to be undergoing a revival, while the Islamic State was in continued decline (see figure 2.2).²⁴

Water stress and other climate change impacts

Linkages between environmental, climate change and security issues in the MENA region are ‘complex, multi-level and go in several directions’.²⁵ Growing competition over natural resources, especially water, is adding to existing tensions within the region and creating new potential conflicts. Compared with other regions, climate impact scenarios in the MENA region are generally more serious: temperatures are projected to rise more and droughts to be longer, deeper and more frequent than the global average.²⁶ Although most lakes and rivers cross national borders, the MENA region has few transboundary water agreements. Over 60 per cent of the population lives

²² Heller, S., ‘Rightsizing the transnational jihadist threat’, Commentary, International Crisis Group, 12 Dec. 2018.

²³ United Nations, ‘ISIL now “a covert global network” despite significant losses, United Nations counter-terrorism head tells Security Council’, Press Release SC/13463, 23 Aug. 2018; and United Nations, Security Council, *Seventh 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/2018/770, 16 Aug. 2018.

²⁴ Van der Heide, L., Winter, C. and Maher, S., ‘The cost of crying victory: Policy implications of the Islamic State’s territorial collapse’, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism Report, Nov. 2018; and Burke, J., ‘Without territory or new recruits, Islamic State is in its death throes’, *The Guardian*, 17 Feb. 2019.

²⁵ Schaar, J., ‘A confluence of crises environment, climate change and security in the MENA region’, SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 2019/4, July 2019.

²⁶ World Bank, *World Bank Group Climate Change Action Plan 2016–2020* (World Bank: Washington, DC, 2016); and *The Economist*, ‘Climate change is making the Arab world more miserable’, 31 May 2018; and Schaar (note 25).

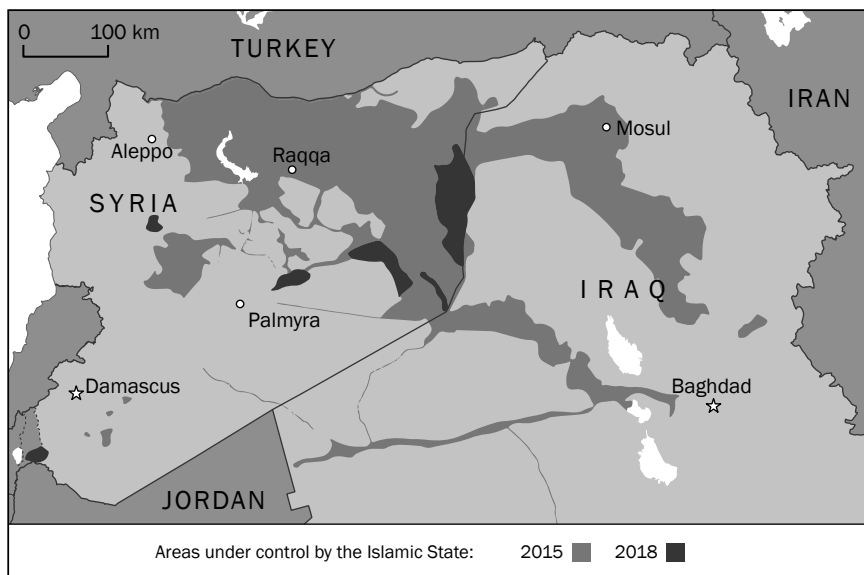


Figure 2.2. Territory lost by the Islamic State between 2015 and 2018

Credit: 'The Caliphate's rise and fall: Territory lost by IS between 2015 and 2018', Building Trust: The Challenge of Peace and Stability in the Mediterranean, Rome 2018 MED—Mediterranean Dialogues, Italian Institute for International Political Studies, 2018, p. 14.

in areas with high or very high surface water stress (i.e. where more water is used than is replenished).²⁷ This contributes to increasing food insecurity.²⁸

In several cases, climate change and water stress have played direct or indirect roles in recent and ongoing conflicts in the region: the drought in Syria (combined with the dismantling of support mechanisms for farmers), rising food prices in Egypt in the run-up to the Arab Spring, and the water-related nature of most of the rural conflicts in Yemen in 2013.²⁹ Using the control of water as a weapon against civilians is commonplace, including by militant groups such as the Islamic State.³⁰

²⁷ World Bank, *Beyond Scarcity: Water Security in the Middle East and North Africa* (World Bank: Washington, DC, 2017); and UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), *Overview of Shared Water Resources Management in the Arab Region for Informing Progress on SDG 6.5* (ESCWA: Beirut, 2018).

²⁸ UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), *Arab Horizon 2030: Prospects for Enhancing Food Security in the Arab Region*, ESCWA and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), E/ESCWA/SDPD/2017/1 (ESCWA: Beirut, 2017).

²⁹ Smith, D. and Krampe, F., 'Climate-related security risks in the Middle East', ed. A. Jägerskog, M. Schulz and A. Swain, *Routledge Handbook on Middle East Security* (Routledge: London, 2019).

³⁰ Schwartzstein, P., 'Climate change and water woes drove ISIS recruiting in Iraq', *National Geographic*, 14 Nov. 2017.

In 2018, violent protests in southern Iraq were directly related to the breakdown of water and energy services.³¹ In Lebanon, the presence of Syrian refugees in the Bekaa Valley exacerbated tensions around scarce water resources.³² In Egypt in April 2018, water-management measures by the government led to demonstrations by farmers, and in North Africa more generally, there were hundreds of local protests against water shortages during the year.³³ In Iran, there was also frequent unrest during the year because of failing water services.³⁴ In Gaza, 97 per cent of the drinking water was contaminated.³⁵

Armed conflict in Egypt

Egypt is the most populous Arab country (98 million in 2018) and has often played a central role in the politics of the Middle East. In 2011, after almost 30 years in office, President Hosni Mubarak was toppled by the Arab Spring protests. His successor, President Mohammed Morsi, was removed from office in a military coup in July 2013, and Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, a retired field marshal and former defence minister, was elected president in May 2014.³⁶

An insurgency erupted in northern Sinai in 2013, with attacks focused on the security forces. However, after militants in Sinai embraced the Islamic State in 2014 (the local affiliate is Islamic State–Al Wilayat Sinai, or Islamic State–Sinai Province), there were large-scale attacks on civilian targets, including the bombing of a Russian airliner in 2015 that killed all 224 people on board.³⁷ A state of emergency has existed in northern Sinai since October 2014, and at the end of 2017 the insurgency in the region was Egypt's main internal security threat.³⁸

In 2018, there were believed to be about 2000 active jihadists in Sinai, although the ongoing war against the Islamic State was largely hidden from

³¹ International Crisis Group (ICG), *How to Cope with Iraq's Summer Brushfire*, Middle East Briefing no. 61 (ICG: Brussels, 31 July 2018); and Hassan, K., Born, C. and Nordqvist, P., 'Iraq: Climate-related security risk assessment', Expert Working Group on Climate-related Security Risks, Aug. 2018.

³² El-Kareh, J. et al., *Water Conflict in the Bekaa: Assessing Predisposition and Contributing Factors*, AUB Policy Institute, Policy Brief no. 3 (IFI-AUB Policy Institute: Beirut, July 2018).

³³ Malka, H., *Water Pressure: Water, Protest, and State Legitimacy in the Maghreb* (Center for Strategic & International Studies: Washington, DC, 2018).

³⁴ Hiltermann, J. et al., 'Iran's Ahvaz attack worsens Gulf tensions', Commentary, International Crisis Group, 24 Sep. 2018.

³⁵ Rinat, Z., 'Ninety-seven percent of Gaza drinking water contaminated by sewage, salt, expert warns', *Haaretz*, 21 Jan. 2018.

³⁶ BBC News, 'Egypt country profile', 7 Jan. 2019.

³⁷ BBC News, 'Russian plane crash: What we know', 17 Nov. 2015.

³⁸ Agence France-Presse, 'Egypt declares state of emergency in Sinai after checkpoint bombing', *The Guardian*, 25 Oct. 2014.

the outside world.³⁹ In February 2018, the Egyptian armed forces launched a new military campaign, Comprehensive Operation Sinai 2018, to combat the insurgency; unverified allegations have been made that the campaign has used cluster munitions.⁴⁰ In the first attack on foreign tourists in Egypt in more than a year, a bomb attack by unknown Islamic militants killed four people in December. Egyptian security forces then killed 40 suspected militants in three separate raids.⁴¹

During the first quarter of 2018, President Sisi removed five presidential challengers through imprisonment or intimidation; he was re-elected on 29 March with 97 per cent of the vote but with a voter turnout of only 41 per cent.⁴² At the end of the year, Egypt faced the worst human rights conditions in decades and open civil war in Sinai.

Armed conflict in Iraq

Military operations that aimed to vanquish the Islamic State in its remaining pockets of rural territory in northern Iraq continued in 2018, despite the government declaring in December 2017 that the group was defeated.⁴³ Sporadic Islamic State bomb attacks in cities also persisted.⁴⁴ According to a United Nations report released in November 2018, there were as many as 12 000 bodies in over 200 mass graves in areas of Iraq once controlled by the Islamic State.⁴⁵ The two remaining cities under Islamic State control, Mosul and Tal Afar, were recaptured in 2017 at great human and infrastructural cost.⁴⁶ An international donor conference in February 2018 pledged almost \$30 billion (a mix of grants, loans and investment promises) towards reconstruction costs in Iraq, although the Iraqi Government was seeking

³⁹ Malsin, J. and El-Fekki, A., 'Egypt's hidden war against Islamic State upends lives in Sinai', *Wall Street Journal*, 11 Oct. 2018; and Intelligence Online, 'Despite strong support from Israel, Egypt still struggling in Sinai', no. 818, 21 Nov. 2018.

⁴⁰ *The Economist*, 'Egypt goes on the offensive in Sinai', 15 Feb. 2018; Tawfeek, F., '26 militants killed, 173 arrested in latest Sinai operations: Armed forces', *Egypt Independent*, 25 Apr. 2018; and Amnesty International, 'Egypt: Use of banned cluster bombs in North Sinai confirmed by Amnesty International', 1 Mar. 2018. On cluster munitions, also see chapter 9, section II, in this volume.

⁴¹ Busby, M., 'Egyptian forces kill 40 suspected militants after tourist bus bomb', *The Guardian*, 29 Dec. 2018.

⁴² *The Economist*, 'Egypt's choice: President Sisi, or a man who adores him', 22 Mar. 2018; and Davidson, J. and Tolba, A., 'Egypt's Sisi wins 97 percent in election with no real opposition', Reuters, 2 Apr. 2018.

⁴³ BBC News, 'Iraq declares war with Islamic State is over', 9 Dec. 2017.

⁴⁴ See e.g. El-Ghobashy, T. and Salim, M., 'Twin suicide bombers target Baghdad, killing 27 in popular shopping district', *Washington Post*, 15 Jan. 2018.

⁴⁵ UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Unearthing Atrocities: Mass Graves in Territory Formerly Controlled by ISIL* (UNAMI/OHCHR: Geneva, 6 Nov. 2018).

⁴⁶ See Davis (note 9), pp. 70–72.

\$88 billion.⁴⁷ Reprisals against suspected jihadists and their families in liberated areas added to underlying sectarian tensions in the country.⁴⁸

The anti-Islamic State forces are themselves fragmented: in addition to the Iraqi Army, supported by the US-led Global Coalition Against Daesh, they include the Kurdish Peshmerga and the Hashd al-Shaabi, also known as the Popular Mobilization Forces—an Iraqi state-sponsored umbrella organization composed of a number of predominantly Shiite militias (some supported by Iran), as well as Sunni, Christian, Shabak, Yazidi and Turkmen militias.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, the improving security situation in Iraq is confirmed by UN estimates of declining civilian casualties as a result of ‘acts of terrorism and conflict-related violence’—less than 1000 killed in 2018 for the first time in a decade (see table 2.4). Although Iraq appeared to be entering a post-conflict period in 2018, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) suggested a mixed picture: while ‘organized political violence events’ fell by nearly 50 per cent compared with 2017, over 6000 conflict-related deaths were still recorded during the year.⁵⁰ In sum, Iraq remained a fragile country with weak state institutions.

It was anticipated that the regional and national elections in 2018 would help facilitate intercommunal reconciliation, but the early signs were mixed. First, there appeared to be little progress in settling the Kurdish boundary question or finding a mutually acceptable formula for sharing Iraq’s oil and gas revenues.⁵¹ Second, although still highly fragmented, many Sunnis appeared to be willing to engage in the national political process in pursuit of greater devolution of power. Third, the Shias appear to have splintered into alignments with various non-Shia parties, which contributed to delays in selecting a new prime minister (a former oil minister and Shia politician, Adel Abdul Mahdi) and forming a new government.⁵² It remains to be seen if these political changes will dilute Iran’s influence over decision making in

⁴⁷ Coker, M. and Harris, G., ‘Iraq wants \$88 billion for rebuilding. Allies offer a fraction of that’, *New York Times*, 13 Feb. 2018; and Graham-Harrison, E., ‘Donor conference pledges \$30bn to help Iraq rebuild after ISIS’, *The Guardian*, 15 Feb. 2018.

⁴⁸ Taub, B., ‘Iraq’s post-ISIS campaign of revenge’, *New Yorker*, 24 Dec. 2018; and Chulov, M., “‘They deserve no mercy’: Iraq deals briskly with accused ‘women of ISIS’”, *The Guardian*, 22 May 2018. On the issue of continuing support for the Islamic State among Iraqis, see Kaltenthaler, K., Silverman, D. and Dagher, M., ‘Identity, ideology, and information: The sources of Iraqi public support for the Islamic State’, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 41, no. 10 (2018), pp. 801–824.

⁴⁹ Mansour, R. and van Veen, E., ‘Iraq’s competing security forces after the battle for Mosul’, War on the Rocks, 25 Aug. 2017; and International Crisis Group (ICG), *Iraq’s Paramilitary Groups: The Challenge of Rebuilding a Functioning State*, Middle East Report no. 188 (ICG: Brussels, 30 July 2018). The Global Coalition Against Daesh maintains a website at <www.theglobalcoalition.org>.

⁵⁰ Dodge, T., ‘Iraq: A year of living dangerously’, *Survival*, vol. 60, no. 5 (2018), pp. 41–48; and Kishi, R. and Pavlik, M., ‘ACLED 2018: The year in review’, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 11 Jan. 2019.

⁵¹ International Crisis Group (ICG), *Reviving UN Mediation on Iraq’s Disputed Internal Boundaries*, Middle East Report no. 194 (ICG: Brussels, 14 Dec. 2018).

⁵² Al Jazeera, ‘Iraq: Parliament elects Barham Salih as new president’, 2 Oct. 2018; and Ibrahim, A., ‘Shia blocs in Iraq remain divided months after vote’, Al Jazeera, 5 Aug. 2018.

Table 2.4. Civilian deaths in Iraq from terrorism and conflict-related violence, 2009–2018

| 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|------|------|------|------|------|--------|------|------|------|------|
| 3056 | 2953 | 2771 | 3238 | 7818 | 12 282 | 7515 | 6878 | 3298 | 939 |

Source: United Nations Iraq, 'UN casualty figures for Iraq for the month of December 2018', 3 Jan. 2019.

Iraq. In late September, the USA closed its consulate in Basra—one of three US diplomatic missions in the country—citing threats from Iranian and Iranian-backed forces in Iraq.⁵³ The Iranian Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, denied that his country was responsible for the threats.⁵⁴

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict

The history of Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Golan Heights—territories it captured in the 1967 Arab–Israeli War—is extensive and complex.⁵⁵ In December 2017, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict returned to the centre of international attention when US President Donald J. Trump formally recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel—despite widespread international objections—and announced that the US embassy would move there from Tel Aviv, triggering protests by Palestinians throughout Gaza, Jerusalem and the West Bank.⁵⁶ In 2018, Israeli settlement expansion in the occupied territories remained a contentious issue.⁵⁷

The conflict in Gaza

In 2018, the ongoing civil unrest and armed conflict between Israel and Hamas and other Palestinian organizations in Gaza rose to its highest level since the 2014 Israel–Gaza War. Hamas—a Palestinian Sunni-Islamist organization, with both a social service wing (Dawah) and a military wing (the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades)—has been the de facto governing authority

⁵³ Kesling, B. and Gordon, M. R., 'US to close consulate in Iraq, citing threats from Iran', *Wall Street Journal*, 29 Sep. 2018.

⁵⁴ Wolfe, J., 'Iran foreign minister blasts Trump officials over consulate closure', Reuters, 30 Sep. 2018.

⁵⁵ See e.g. Shlaim, A., *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (W. W. Norton: New York, 2014); Thrall, N., *The Only Language They Understand: Forcing Compromise in Israel and Palestine* (Metropolitan Books: New York, 2017); and Anziska, S., *Preventing Palestine: A Political History from Camp David to Oslo* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 2018).

⁵⁶ See Davis (note 9), pp. 72–73. See also Persson, A., 'Palestine at the end of the state-building process: Technical achievements, political failures', *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 23, no. 4 (2018), pp. 433–452.

⁵⁷ Al Jazeera, 'Israeli settlement activity surged in Trump era: Monitor group', 2 Jan. 2019.

of the Gaza Strip since the 2007 Fatah– Hamas conflict.⁵⁸ Hamas and Israel fought wars in 2008–2009, 2012 and 2014. Gaza has also been subject to an Israeli and Egyptian blockade for over a decade, which has caused a growing humanitarian crisis and turned the territory into what has been called ‘the world’s largest open-air prison’.⁵⁹

The near elimination of US funding in 2018 for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and other humanitarian projects, in retaliation for the Palestinian leadership’s refusal to engage in a US-led political process, further increased the pressure on Gazan society (80 per cent of the population depend on foreign aid to meet daily living requirements).⁶⁰ However, a number of donor countries have pledged to increase their funding in order to replace US funding for the agency.⁶¹

On 30 March 2018, Israeli forces responded to the largest Palestinian protests in several years—labelled the March of Return (demanding the right of refugees to return to their places of origin in Israel)—at various points along the Gaza–Israel border fence, by firing live ammunition (rubber-coated bullets and tear gas) that killed 17 and wounded over 1400 unarmed protesters.⁶² The UN Secretary-General, the High Representative of the European Union (EU), UN human rights organizations and Gazan families called for an independent investigation into the Israeli soldiers’ use of force.⁶³ The Israeli Defence Minister, Avigdor Lieberman, rejected these requests.⁶⁴

Palestinians kept up the protests in the build-up to the 70th anniversary of al-Nakba (or Nakba Day, commemorating the expulsion of some 750 000 Palestinians from their homes in Israel during the 1948 war) on 15 May. Earlier, on 18 April, Israelis celebrated 70 years of independence.⁶⁵ Casualties continued to rise as Israeli forces persisted in using armed force to suppress

⁵⁸ The 2007 Fatah– Hamas conflict, also referred to as the Palestinian Civil War, was a conflict between the 2 main Palestinian political parties, Fatah and Hamas, resulting in the split of the Palestinian Authority in 2007. Fatah, under Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, retains control of the West Bank.

⁵⁹ S. Roy, *The Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of De-development*, 3rd edition (Institute for Palestinian Studies: Washington, DC, 2016); and Høvring, R., ‘Gaza: The world’s largest open-air prison’, Norwegian Refugee Council, 26 Apr. 2018.

⁶⁰ Iqtait, A., ‘Aid and its limits in Palestine’, *The Interpreter*, 9 Oct. 2017; US Department of State, ‘On US assistance to UNRWA’, Press statement, 31 Aug. 2018; and ‘Report: US to end all funding for UNRWA’, Middle East Monitor, 29 Aug. 2018.

⁶¹ Al Jazeera, ‘Donors to increase UNRWA support and funding despite US cuts’, 2 Sep. 2018.

⁶² Kubovich, Y., ‘Israeli forces to deploy more than 100 snipers along Gaza border ahead of mass protests’, *Haaretz*, 30 Mar. 2018; and Thrall, N., ‘Gaza protests mark shift in Palestinian national consciousness’, Commentary, International Crisis Group, 2 Apr. 2018.

⁶³ *The Guardian*, ‘Gaza deaths: UN secretary general calls for “transparent” investigation’, 31 Mar. 2018.

⁶⁴ Holmes, O. and Balousha, H., ‘Israel rejects UN and EU calls for inquiry into Gaza bloodshed’, *The Guardian*, 1 Apr. 2018.

⁶⁵ *The Economist*, ‘Israel at 70’, 17 May 2018.

the weekly Palestinian protests.⁶⁶ On the eve of the al-Nakba anniversary, President Trump's daughter and son-in-law travelled to Jerusalem to open the new US embassy. That same day at least 60 unarmed Palestinians were killed and around 2700 injured in protests near the border fence.⁶⁷ Various UN statements condemned Israel's actions, and Palestinians called for the International Criminal Court (ICC) to launch a full investigation into alleged Israeli violations of international humanitarian law—in 2015 it had begun a preliminary examination of the conduct of the 2014 war and Israel's relocation of its citizens to settlements in occupied Palestinian territory.⁶⁸

Despite the continuing violence, weekly demonstrations continued along the border until the end of the year, although the protests were scaled back in November in exchange for limited aid concessions by Israel.⁶⁹ According to health officials in Gaza, more than 210 Palestinians were killed and more than 18 000 were wounded by Israeli forces during the protests in 2018.⁷⁰ The wounded included around 2000 people being treated for serious gunshot injuries to the legs, with many of the wounds infected by multi-drug-resistant bacteria.⁷¹ One Israeli soldier was killed by Palestinian gunfire during the protests.

From July to the end of the year, frequent military exchanges between Hamas (rockets fired into Israel) and Israel (air strikes in Gaza) threatened to escalate into a new full-scale confrontation.⁷² In October, the ICC warned Israel of a possible investigation of alleged war crimes in Gaza by both Israel and Hamas.⁷³ Israel criticized the ICC statement and raised doubts over the prosecutor's impartiality.⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch accused both the

⁶⁶ Abuheweila, I. and Halbfinger, D. M., 'Plan to storm fence gets bloody preview in Gaza', *New York Times*, 27 Apr. 2018.

⁶⁷ Vick, K., 'Gaza border becomes scene of death as US opens embassy in Jerusalem', *Time*, 14 May 2018; and *The Economist*, 'Deadly protests on Gaza's border with Israel', 17 May 2018.

⁶⁸ BBC News, 'Israel's Gaza response "wholly disproportionate"—UN rights chief', 18 May 2018; BBC News, 'Palestinians demand full ICC investigation into "Israeli war crimes"', 22 May 2018; and UN News, 'UN General Assembly urges greater protection for Palestinians, deplores Israel's "excessive" use of force', 13 June 2018.

⁶⁹ *The Economist*, 'An election looms in Israel', 15 Nov. 2018; and Halbfinger, D. M., 'Tensions ease in Gaza, allowing money and fuel to roll in', *New York Times*, 9 Nov. 2018.

⁷⁰ These figures cover the period from the start of the protests on 30 Mar. 2018 to 12 Nov. 2018. See Al Jazeera, 'Gaza protests: All the latest updates', 12 Nov. 2018.

⁷¹ Davies, M. and Graham-Harrison, E., 'Palestinian superbug epidemic could spread, say doctors', *The Guardian*, 31 Dec. 2018.

⁷² Heller, A., 'Israel exchanges intense fire with Hamas militants in Gaza', Associated Press, 15 July 2018; International Crisis Group (ICG), *Averting War in Gaza*, Middle East Briefing no. 60 (ICG: Brussels, 20 July 2018); and Kershner, I., 'Israel strikes Gaza after a rocket is fired', *New York Times*, 17 Oct. 2018.

⁷³ Bob, Y. J., 'ICC issues harsh warning to Israel of possible war crimes in Gaza', *Jerusalem Post*, 17 Oct. 2018.

⁷⁴ Ahren, R., 'Israel scolds ICC prosecutor over warning of war crimes in Bedouin village', *Times of Israel*, 18 Oct. 2018.

Palestinian Authority (in the West Bank) and Hamas (in Gaza) of perpetrating abuses against opponents, in a deepening of the Fatah–Hamas feud.⁷⁵

One Israeli army officer and seven Palestinians, including a local Hamas commander, were killed after an incursion by Israeli special forces disguised as aid workers into Gaza on 11 November, triggering further Hamas rocket fire and Israeli air strikes.⁷⁶ After Hamas had fired about 400 rockets and mortars into Israel and Israeli aircraft had attacked at least 100 sites in Gaza, another ceasefire was agreed, leading to the resignation of Lieberman.⁷⁷ At the end of 2018, rising West Bank instability added to the tensions in Gaza, where the ceasefire remained fragile. In the 12 months from 6 December 2017, Israel reportedly arrested 5600 Palestinians in the occupied territories.⁷⁸

The peace process

Intermittent peace discussions have been held since the beginning of the conflict. Since 2003 the basis for a Palestinian–Israeli peace agreement has been a two-state solution—an independent state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel. The most recent direct negotiations between the two sides took place in 2013–14, but collapsed in April 2014.⁷⁹ In early 2018, it was reported that the US administration was preparing a new peace initiative led by Trump’s son-in-law and US Middle East peace envoy, Jared Kushner.⁸⁰ By the end of the year, however, the long-awaited ‘deal of the century’ had not been released.⁸¹

Whether the two-state solution remains part of current US thinking, or even a viable proposition, is increasingly doubtful.⁸² According to a survey in March 2018, more Palestinians now oppose a two-state solution than support one, and a majority—57 per cent—said that such a solution is no longer practical because of Israeli settlement expansion. Despite this, only 28 per cent of Palestinians supported a one-state solution—a single country with an

⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch, ‘Two authorities, one way, zero dissent: Arbitrary arrest and torture under the Palestinian Authority and Hamas’, Oct. 2018.

⁷⁶ Halbfinger, D. M., ‘Deadly Gaza raid by Israel threatens nascent cease-fire’, *New York Times*, 11 Nov. 2018; and Harel, A., ‘Botched special ops in Gaza brings Israel and Hamas to brink of war’, *Haaretz*, 13 Nov. 2018.

⁷⁷ Holmes, O. and Balousha, H., ‘Israel and Hamas agree to Gaza ceasefire after intense violence’, *The Guardian*, 13 Nov. 2018; and BBC News, ‘Israel Defence Minister Lieberman resigns over Gaza ceasefire’, 14 Nov. 2018.

⁷⁸ Halbfinger, D. M., ‘West Bank shootings raise fear that Hamas is expanding its fight’, *New York Times*, 13 Dec. 2018; and Middle East Monitor, ‘Israel arrests 5600 Palestinians in year since Trump’s Jerusalem decision’, 7 Dec. 2018.

⁷⁹ National Public Radio, ‘Former US envoy explains why Mideast peace talks collapsed in 2014’, 8 June 2017.

⁸⁰ White House, ‘Readout of the Gaza conference at the White House’, 14 Mar. 2018.

⁸¹ Gardner, D., ‘Trump’s “deal of the century” offers nothing good to Palestinians’, *Financial Times*, 5 Sep. 2018; and Miller, A., ‘The Israeli–Palestine conflict is not a bankruptcy sale’, *Lawfare*, 23 Jan. 2019.

⁸² Djerejian, E. P., Muasher, M. and Brown, N. J., ‘Two states or one? Reappraising the Israeli–Palestinian impasse’, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy, Sep. 2018.

Arab majority and equal rights for all.⁸³ In July, in a further potential blow to the two-state solution, the Israeli Parliament passed a controversial law defining Israel as the national homeland of the Jewish people. The law also states that ‘the right to national self-determination in Israel is unique to the Jewish people’ and that a ‘united Jerusalem’ is the Israeli capital, and makes Hebrew the country’s sole official language, while reserving a special status for Arabic. Arab legislators described it as a form of apartheid and legalized segregation.⁸⁴

From July 2018 onwards, there was also a more targeted diplomatic effort by Egypt and the UN to avert another Israeli–Palestinian war in Gaza. This sought to advance twin mediation tracks: one between Israel and Hamas that revives the 2014 ceasefire agreement and anchors it in a long-term and sustainable truce, and a second between Hamas and Fatah to advance Palestinian reunification and the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza.⁸⁵ However, at the end of the year, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process said that Israelis and Palestinians were even ‘further away’ from a resolution to the conflict.⁸⁶

Armed conflict in Libya

There has been armed conflict in Libya since an armed rebellion, with Western military assistance, deposed its leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.⁸⁷ Under the 2015 Libyan Political Agreement (LPA), a UN-backed unity government—the Government of National Accord (GNA)—was installed in Tripoli in 2016, headed by the Prime Minister, Fayez Sarraj. The GNA relies on the support of a loose alliance of four large militias in the capital: the Special Deterrence Force, the Tripoli Revolutionaries Battalion, the Nawasi Battalion, and the Abu Slim unit of the Central Security Apparatus.⁸⁸ By early 2018, these four militias controlled what remained of the Libyan state and its institutions in Tripoli.⁸⁹ The GNA is opposed by a rival state institution, the

⁸³ Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey, Public Opinion Poll no. 67, 27 Mar. 2018.

⁸⁴ Lis, J. and Landau, N., ‘Israel passes controversial Jewish Nation-state Bill after stormy debate’, *Haaretz*, 19 July 2018.

⁸⁵ *The Economist*, ‘Will a flurry of diplomacy help Israel and the Palestinians?’ 23 Aug. 2018; and International Crisis Group (ICG), *Rebuilding the Gaza Ceasefire*, Middle East Report no. 191 (ICG: Brussels, 16 Nov. 2018).

⁸⁶ UN News, ‘“We are nowhere closer” to Israeli–Palestinian peace deal, than a year ago, Security Council hears’, 18 Dec. 2018.

⁸⁷ Kuperman, A., ‘Obama’s Libya debacle: How a well-meaning intervention ended in failure’, *Foreign Affairs*, Mar/Apr. 2015; and Hamid, S., ‘Everyone says the Libya intervention was a failure. They’re wrong’, Brookings Institution, 12 Apr. 2016.

⁸⁸ On the Libyan conflict in 2016 and 2017 see Smith, D., ‘The Middle East and North Africa: 2016 in perspective’, *SIPRI Yearbook 2017*, pp. 83–84; and Davis (note 9), pp. 74–75. On the rise of a militia alliance in Tripoli, see Lacher, W. and al-Idrissi, A., ‘Capital of militias: Tripoli’s armed groups capture the Libyan state’, Small Arms Survey Briefing Paper, June 2018.

⁸⁹ Lacher and al-Idrissi (note 88).

Tobruk-based House of Representatives in the east of the country, which has failed to approve the GNA or ratify the LPA. The House of Representatives is supported by General Khalifa Haftar, head of the self-styled Libyan National Army, which is a mix of military units and armed groups with a tribal or regional basis. Haftar has received military support from Egypt and the UAE, and political support from France and Russia.⁹⁰ Meanwhile, in southern Libya, ethnic Tuareg and Toubou militias have been fighting for control amid general lawlessness, especially on the border with Chad.⁹¹ In late 2018, the three rival forces controlled different parts of the country (see figure 2.3).

Under a September 2017 UN Action Plan, the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) facilitated talks over proposed amendments to the LPA, but the parties failed to reach consensus on military command arrangements, the relative powers of different governing entities, governing mechanisms and other constitutional issues.⁹² At the end of 2017, Haftar announced that he would no longer abide by the LPA, raising the prospect of new fighting between the two main groups and the various militias—as occurred in mid 2018 (see below).⁹³

Renewed violence

New fighting broke out in June 2018 in Libya's coastal area, where most of the country's oil export terminals are located. The Libyan National Army was forced to cede and then retook oil export terminals at Sidra and Ras Lanuf. A subsequent dispute over the management of oil sales was resolved after international pressure and concessions from the GNA—including a request to the UN Security Council to establish an international committee to oversee an independent review of the disbursement of funds by Libya's Central Bank.⁹⁴

In late August, fighting erupted in Tripoli between militias linked to the UN-backed GNA. The Seventh Brigade, a militia formed by the GNA's defence ministry in 2017 and drawn from Tarhouna, a town 65 kilometres to the south-east of Tripoli, launched an assault on the capital. This pitted them against the alliance of militias operating under the GNA's interior

⁹⁰ *The Economist*, 'Libya's feuds cross the Mediterranean', 8 Nov. 2018.

⁹¹ Tubiana, J. and Gramizzi, C., 'Lost in trans-nation: Tubu and other armed groups and smugglers along Libya's southern border', Small Arms Survey, Dec. 2018.

⁹² Blanchard, C. M., *Libya: Transition and US policy*, Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report for Congress RL33142 (US Congress, CRS: Washington, DC, 2 May 2018), p. 3. UNSMIL is a political mission formed in Sep. 2011, see chapter 3, section II, in this volume.

⁹³ Al Jazeera, 'Haftar: Libya's UN-backed government's mandate obsolete', 18 Dec. 2017; and El Amrani, I., 'New risks in Libya as Khalifa Haftar dismisses UN-backed accord', Commentary, International Crisis Group, 21 Dec. 2017.

⁹⁴ Wintour, P., 'Libya urges UN to block oil sales after clashes between rival factions', *The Guardian*, 27 June 2018; and International Crisis Group (ICG), *After the Showdown in Libya's Oil Crescent*, Middle East and North Africa Report no. 189 (ICG: Brussels, 9 Aug. 2018).

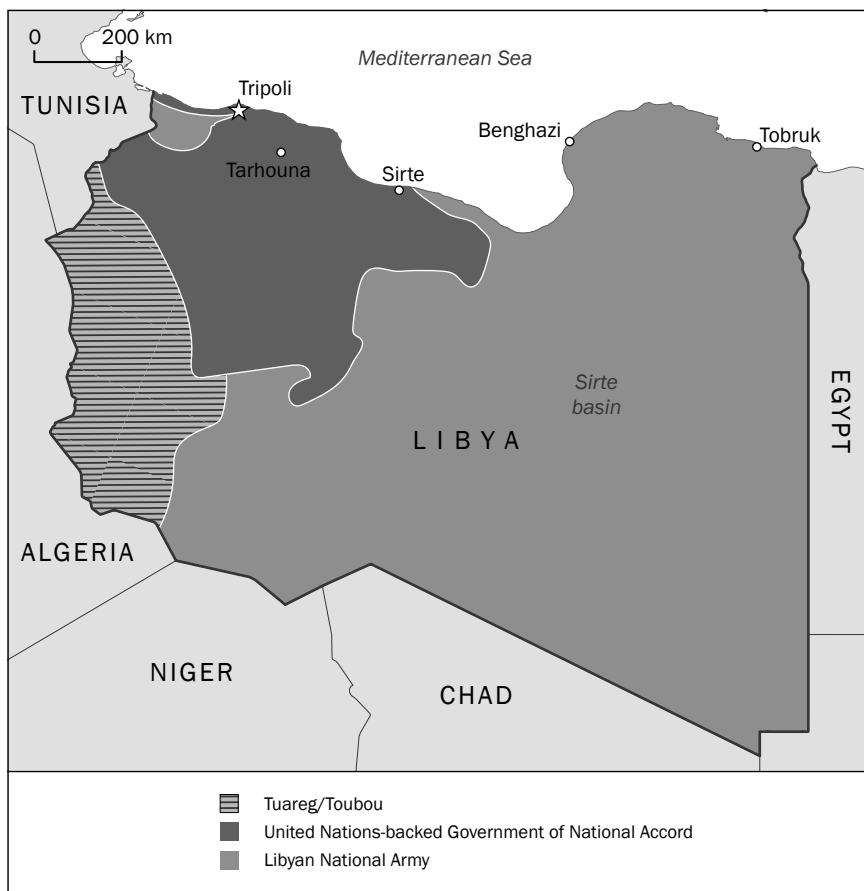


Figure 2.3. Territory controlled by rival forces in Libya, 2018

Credit: Hugo Ahlenius, Norpil.

Source: Live Universal Awareness Map (Liveuamap), cited in 'Libya's feuds cross the Mediterranean', *The Economist*, 8 Nov. 2018.

ministry.⁹⁵ UNSMIL negotiated a fragile ceasefire on 4 September, but by late September the fighting had intensified to the extent that the UN declared a state of emergency in Tripoli.⁹⁶ More than 100 people were killed before UNSMIL negotiated another ceasefire, aided by a package of economic reforms introduced by the Prime Minister on 12 September.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ UN Support Mission in Libya, 'SRSG Ghassan Salame briefing to the Security Council', 5 Sep. 2018; and Al Jazeera, 'Libya: Armed groups vie for control in deadly Tripoli clashes', 27 Aug. 2018.

⁹⁶ Raghavan, S., 'Surge in fighting among Libya's "super militias" imperils Western peace efforts', *Washington Post*, 2 Oct. 2018.

⁹⁷ France 24, 'Libya ceasefire halts month-long battle in Tripoli', 26 Sep. 2018; and International Crisis Group, 'Libya's economic reforms fall short', Watch List update, 25 Oct. 2018.

The power vacuum has allowed a resurgence of Islamist militant groups, including the Islamic State, which carried out more than a dozen attacks in 2018. In September 2018, for example, an attack on Libya's state oil company killed two employees and injured 10 others, and in December an attack on the foreign ministry in Tripoli killed at least three people.⁹⁸ In March, the USA carried out an air strike against suspected al-Qaeda militants in southern Libya.⁹⁹

The peace process

France and Italy have both been vying to influence the peace process in Libya, and each hosted a summit in 2018. Italy's interests are mainly in western Libya, where its Greenstream pipeline carries gas to Sicily. France's preference has been to work with Haftar, whom it sees as more likely to stabilize the country and prevent conflict from spilling over into the adjacent Sahel region (where France has deployed large numbers of troops to fight jihadists).¹⁰⁰ Italian and French energy companies are also competing for oil contracts in Libya.¹⁰¹

On 29 May, France hosted a summit in Paris that brought together the three heads of Libya's main political institutions under the LPA—the GNA's Prime Minister, al-Sarraj; the president of the House of Representatives, Agilah Saleh; and the president of the High Council of State (an unelected advisory body), Khaled Mishri—as well as Haftar. An eight-point declaration, which was endorsed but not signed by the four men, agreed to establish the constitutional basis for elections by 16 September 2018 and hold elections by 10 December 2018.¹⁰² All five permanent members of the UN Security Council, along with the EU, the Arab League and the African Union, backed the Paris declaration, not least because of concerns about the Islamic State and Libya's role as a conduit for migrants and refugees heading to Europe.¹⁰³

Meanwhile, an UNSMIL-mandated National Conference Process (NCP)—a series of public consultations focusing on priorities for the national government, security, governance and the electoral process—took place between April and July 2018. More than 6000 Libyans participated in more than 70 meetings convened in 43 locations across Libya, as well as with diaspora groups outside the country. Particular efforts were made to

⁹⁸ Malsin, J. and Faucon, B., 'Islamic State's deadly return in Libya imperils oil output', *Wall Street Journal*, 18 Sep. 2018; and Al Jazeera, 'Libya: 3 dead in attack on foreign ministry building in Tripoli', 26 Dec. 2018.

⁹⁹ Walsh, D. and Schmitt, E., 'US strikes Qaeda target in southern Libya, expanding shadow war there', *New York Times*, 25 Mar. 2018.

¹⁰⁰ On the conflict in the Sahel, see section VI in this chapter.

¹⁰¹ *The Economist* (note 90).

¹⁰² Permanent Mission of France to the UN in New York, 'Political statement on Libya: Joint statement by Fayeze al-Sarraj, Aguila Saleh, Khalid Meshri, Khalifa Haftar, Paris', 29 May 2018.

¹⁰³ International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), 'The UN's election gamble in Libya', *Strategic Comments*, vol. 24, no. 18 (2018), pp. iv–vi.

engage women, internally displaced people, ethnic minorities and youth. An online campaign received the attention of 131 000 Facebook users and 1400 Twitter followers.¹⁰⁴ The Head of UNSMIL, Ghassan Salamé, highlighted one important point of consensus that emerged from the NCP: a broad agreement across Libya on the need for new elections.¹⁰⁵ However, Italy, the United Kingdom and the USA, among others, as well as many Libyans, viewed the timetable agreed at the Paris summit as unrealistic given the level of violence in the country and the uncertain constitutional basis for the elections.¹⁰⁶

Italy proposed an alternative plan that involved postponing the elections and organizing a Libyan National Conference (as envisaged in the NCP) in January 2019. On 12–13 November, Italy held a summit in Palermo with representatives of many of the rival Libyan leaders and delegations from 38 countries to promote this agenda. Haftar attended only the second day, and then only a mini-summit with al-Sarraj on the sidelines of the main summit.¹⁰⁷ The summit led to no significant breakthroughs, and any support for a reconfigured UN Action Plan seemed unlikely to overcome continued disagreements, both between Libyan factions and between international actors, over several elements of the political road map, including how to distribute oil and gas revenues.

Armed conflict in Syria

Since 2011, the political power of the Alawite elite in Syria has been contested in a multi-sided armed conflict that, while initially sparked by the Arab Spring, evolved into a complex war involving regional and international powers.¹⁰⁸

While the war was far from over, 2018 saw a clear de-escalation due to both the Syrian Government's consolidation of territorial control and the near defeat of the Islamic State.¹⁰⁹ However, as the armed opposition to the government of President Bashar al-Assad weakened, the civil war was pushed in new directions by Israel's air strikes, Turkey's cross-border

¹⁰⁴ Alunni, A. and Tusa, F., 'In search of a negotiated solution in Libya', Aspenia online, 13 Sep. 2018. Reports of the NCP meetings are available in Arabic at <<http://multaqawatani.ly>>.

¹⁰⁵ UN Support Mission in Libya (note 95).

¹⁰⁶ International Institute for Strategic Studies (note 103); and Smith, R. and Pack, J., 'Libya's house of cards: Elections without institutions', Lawfare, 19 Aug. 2018.

¹⁰⁷ Tondo, L. and Wintour, P., 'Italian summit on Libya in disarray as Trump and Putin stay away', *The Guardian*, 12 Nov. 2018; and De Maio, G., 'The Palermo conference on Libya: A diplomatic test for Italy's new government', Brookings, 19 Nov. 2018.

¹⁰⁸ On the Syrian conflict in 2016 and 2017 see Smith, D., 'The Middle East and North Africa: 2016 in perspective', *SIPRI Yearbook 2017*, pp. 83–84; and Davis (note 9), pp. 76–79.

¹⁰⁹ For an assessment of why the Syrian Government was successful in the war, see Zisser, E., 'Why has Bashar won the war in Syria?', *Strategic Assessment*, vol. 21, no. 2 (July 2018), pp. 65–74.

military operations, and Iran's entrenched presence. Remnants of the Islamic State also remained a threat throughout the year.¹¹⁰

Overall, the Syrian conflict continued to be one of the most devastating in the world. Although there are no reliable casualty statistics, over 400 000 Syrians are thought to have died as a result of the fighting since the war broke out, and ACLED estimates that there were approximately 30 200 fatalities in 2018.¹¹¹ The war accounted for nearly 30 per cent of all organized violence events in the ACLED dataset for 2018, the most of any single country. Syria also continued to have the highest number of civilian casualties: over 7100 killed in 2018.¹¹² The non-governmental organization Action on Armed Violence attributes the high number of civilian casualties to the use of explosive weapons—such as large bombs and missiles, indirect fire weapons (mortars, rockets and artillery) and improvised explosive devices (IEDs)—especially in populated areas.¹¹³ Between 2011 and 2018, 79 206 people are known to have been killed or injured by explosive weapons in Syria, of which 85 per cent (67 263) were civilians; the true figure is probably far higher.¹¹⁴ Clearance of landmines and remnants of other explosive weapons could take up to 50 years.¹¹⁵

A report by the UN Secretary-General in October described 'deeply disturbing violence against children' in the Syrian civil war, including 12 537 verified 'grave violations' against children between 16 November 2013 and the end of June 2018. The grave violations covered in the report are recruitment and use in military actions, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, abduction, and denial of humanitarian access.¹¹⁶

Conflict continued to be the driver of humanitarian needs. With the end of large-scale fighting in many parts of the country, some 1.2 million internally displaced people were able to return to their area of origin in the first 10 months of 2018. In other areas, however, large-scale internal displacement continued throughout the year. Although over 42 000 refugees were known to have returned during January–November, at the end of 2018 half the

¹¹⁰ Schmitt, E., 'Thousands of ISIS fighters flee in Syria, many to fight another day', *New York Times*, 4 Feb. 2018; and Brotman, A., 'US troops withdrawal from Syria and the threat of Islamic State', *Global Risks Insights*, 30 Dec. 2018.

¹¹¹ Specia (note 4); Humud, C., Margesson, R. and Chesser, S., 'Counting casualties in Syria and Iraq: Process and challenges', *Congressional Research Service (CRS) Insight*, 12 Apr. 2016; and *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, 'Data export tool', [n.d.].

¹¹² Kishi and Pavlik (note 50).

¹¹³ On the issue of explosive weapons in populated areas, see also chapter 9, section I, in this volume.

¹¹⁴ Dathan, J., 'The reverberating effects of explosive weapon use in Syria', *Action on Armed Violence*, Jan. 2019.

¹¹⁵ British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 'Clearance of improvised explosive devices in the Middle East, Monday 22–Wednesday 24 May 2017', *Wilton Park Report WP1548*, June 2017.

¹¹⁶ United Nations, Security Council, 'Children and armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic: Report of the Secretary-General', 30 Oct. 2018.

population was still displaced—over 5.6 million refugees (hosted mainly by Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey) and over 6 million internally displaced people.¹¹⁷ As a senior UN official said at a donor conference in April, ‘A quarter of the world’s refugees are Syrians, and a quarter of all Syrians are refugees’.¹¹⁸

About 13.1 million people (over half the Syrian population) urgently required humanitarian assistance, 6.7 million experienced acute food insecurity, and a further 4.5 million were at risk of acute food insecurity in 2018.¹¹⁹ Other assessments suggested a slight fall in food insecurity in Syria in the latter part of the year, in line with improvements in security in many parts of the country.¹²⁰

After the decline of the Islamic State in 2017, underlying conflicts resurfaced in three main fronts in 2018—the north-west, south-west and north-east—with a complex and changing cast of combatants. There was also an increase in direct interventions by regional and global powers: Iran, Israel and Russia in the south-west; Russia and Turkey in the north-west; and Turkey and the USA in the north-east.¹²¹

The tangle of competing foreign militaries in Syria occasionally became even more knotted, risking a widening of the conflict, especially in the use of air power: US air strikes against pro-government forces in February reportedly killed about 100 people, an unknown mix of Syrian Government troops and Russian mercenaries; on 24 July, Israel shot down a Syrian aircraft that was conducting air strikes against rebel forces near the border with the Golan Heights, claiming that it was in ‘gross violation’ of a 1974 UN demilitarization agreement; and in September, a Russian military plane was mistakenly shot down by a Syrian missile that was fired at Israeli aircraft attacking targets in Syria, although Russia initially blamed Israel.¹²²

¹¹⁷ UN High Commissioner for Refugees, ‘Regional strategic overview 2019–2020’, 20 Dec. 2018.

¹¹⁸ UN Development Programme, ‘In Brussels, UN calls for increased support for vulnerable Syrians and host populations’, 24 Apr. 2018.

¹¹⁹ World Food Programme (WFP), ‘WFP Syria situation report no. 1, January 2019’, Jan. 2019.

¹²⁰ Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) and World Food Programme (WFP), ‘Monitoring food security in countries with conflict situations: A joint FAO/WFP update for the United Nations Security Council’, Jan. 2019, pp. 23–24.

¹²¹ *Deutsche Welle*, ‘What foreign powers want from the Syrian war’, 12 Apr. 2018; and Fitch, A. and Rasmussen, S., ‘Iran signs deal with Syria to deepen military cooperation’, *Wall Street Journal*, 27 Aug. 2018. On the issue of foreign financial patronage in the Syrian civil war, see Baylouny, A. M. and Mullins, C. A., ‘Cash is king: Financial sponsorship and changing priorities in the Syrian civil war’, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 41, no. 12 (2018), pp. 990–1010. On Russia’s Middle East policy, see Stepanova, E., ‘Russia and conflicts in the Middle East: Regionalisation and implications for the West’, *International Spectator*, vol. 53, no. 4 (2018), pp. 35–57; and Thornton, R., ‘The Russian military commitment in Syria and the eastern Mediterranean’, *RUSI Journal*, vol. 163, no. 4 (2018), pp. 30–38.

¹²² Yaffa, J., ‘Putin’s shadow army suffers a setback in Syria’, *New Yorker*, 16 Feb. 2018; Reuters, ‘Israel says downed Syrian jet violated 1974 Golan demilitarization’, 24 July 2018; and Landau, N., Kubovich, Y. and Tibon, A., ‘Putin says Israel didn’t down Russian aircraft; Netanyahu offers condolences’, *Haaretz*, 19 Sep. 2018.

The north-west

In the north-west, government forces (backed by Iran and Russia) fought an array of rebel groups, with a focus on the rural province of Idlib and the Damascus suburbs (eastern Ghouta). In January and February, heavy fighting took place in Idlib province between Syrian Government forces and rebel fighters, displacing more than 100 000 people, while in eastern Ghouta 400 000 civilians were trapped without access to humanitarian aid.¹²³ Russian and Syrian Government air strikes resulted in hundreds of casualties, and there were allegations of chemical weapon use by Syrian Government forces.¹²⁴ On 24 February the UN Security Council passed a resolution calling for a 30-day ceasefire across Syria, and on 26 February Russia announced that it would establish a humanitarian corridor in eastern Ghouta.¹²⁵

By early March the Syrian Government, with support from Russia and Iranian militias, had taken control of more than half of eastern Ghouta.¹²⁶ Under an agreement brokered by Russia, approximately 1500 Syrian rebel fighters and 6000 of their family members were evacuated to the rebel-held Idlib province.¹²⁷ In April, 500 Syrians were treated for symptoms consistent with gas poisoning, following an alleged chemical weapon attack by government forces on Douma in eastern Ghouta. In response, France, the UK and the USA launched air strikes against suspected Syrian chemical weapons facilities a week later.¹²⁸ After eastern Ghouta was recaptured by government forces, rebels in Homs in the north agreed to a negotiated surrender.

In August, the Syrian Government and its allies prepared for an offensive on rebel-held Idlib province, home to 3 million civilians (including 1 million internally displaced people from other parts of Syria), as well as about 100 000 armed rebels and assorted jihadists. The UN warned that an attack on Idlib could create a humanitarian emergency ‘on a scale not yet seen’ in

¹²³ Cumming-Bruce, N. and Gladstone, R., ‘Fighting rages in Syria’s last major insurgent stronghold’, *New York Times*, 11 Jan. 2018; and *The Economist*, ‘Syria’s war heats up again’, 22 Feb. 2018.

¹²⁴ Barnard, A. and Gall, C., ‘Syrian bombardment takes its deadliest toll in years’, *New York Times*, 20 Feb. 2018; and BBC News, ‘Syria war: “chlorine attack” on rebel-held Idlib town’, 5 Feb. 2018. On allegations of chemical weapons use in Syria, see also chapter 8, section I, in this volume.

¹²⁵ UN Security Council Resolution 2401 (2018), S/RES/2401 (2018), 24 Feb. 2018; *New Arab*, ‘UN Security Council passes “worthless” resolution on Eastern Ghouta’, 25 Feb. 2018; and McDowell, A. and Stubbs, J., ‘Russia orders daily truce for evacuations from Syria’s eastern Ghouta’, Reuters, 26 Feb. 2018.

¹²⁶ Abdulrahim, R., ‘Syrian regime gains ground in opposition enclave’, *Wall Street Journal*, 11 Mar. 2018.

¹²⁷ Al-Khalidi, S., ‘Syrian rebels agree to evacuate town in Ghouta: Sources’, Reuters, 21 Mar. 2018.

¹²⁸ Nebehay, S., ‘WHO: 500 Syrian patients show symptoms pointing to toxic weapons exposure’, Reuters, 11 Apr. 2018; Borger, J. and Beaumont, P., ‘Syria: US, UK and France launch strikes in response to chemical attack’, *The Guardian*, 14 Apr. 2018; and BBC News, ‘Syria “chemical attack”: Shooting delays OPCW visit to site’, 18 Apr. 2018. On the alleged chemical weapons attack in Douma and the French, UK and US response, see also chapter 8, section I, in this volume.

the seven-year Syrian civil war.¹²⁹ An assault on Idlib seemed to be averted on 17 September by a Russia–Turkey agreement (which was endorsed by Iran and the USA) to establish and monitor a demilitarized buffer zone to protect civilians in the province.¹³⁰ However, although heavy weapons were removed ahead of time, armed militant groups—including jihadists with roots in al-Qaeda—failed to meet the 15 October deadline for withdrawal from the buffer zone, increasing the risk of continued violence.¹³¹

Another alleged chemical weapon attack in Aleppo in November affected more than 100 people. Its origins and the substance used were unclear, but Russia and Syria accused rebel forces of carrying it out.¹³²

The south-west

In mid June, Syrian Government forces backed by Russian air power increased their efforts to retake territory in south-western Syria, displacing more than 270 000 people after two weeks of heavy fighting.¹³³ The area had been covered since July 2017 by a de-escalation agreement negotiated by Jordan, Russia and the USA, although the agreement was never developed from an initial ceasefire into a more lasting solution to the conflict. After Jordan held talks with Russia, a new ceasefire was agreed in the south on 7 July, with Russian military police deployed to help guarantee the agreement.¹³⁴ Despite the reopening of a key border crossing with Jordan in October, most refugees and displaced people were reluctant to return due to the lack of functioning infrastructure, services and employment as well as continuing security concerns.¹³⁵

Israel has sought to maintain a buffer between itself and the Iranian-backed Syrian Government, and in 2018 it steadily escalated air strikes on what it

¹²⁹ Lederer, E. M., 'UN: Idlib offensive could spark worst humanitarian emergency', Associated Press, 28 Aug. 2018; *The Economist*, 'The battle for Syria's last rebel redoubt looms', 6 Sep. 2018; and International Crisis Group (ICG), 'Saving Idlib from destruction', Middle East Briefing no. 63 (ICG: Brussels, 3 Sep. 2018).

¹³⁰ International Crisis Group, 'Syria's Idlib wins welcome reprieve with Russia-Turkey deal', Statement, 18 Sep. 2018; and 'Turkey and Russia cut a deal over Syria', *The Economist*, 20 Sep. 2018.

¹³¹ Al Jazeera, 'Deadline passes for Syria's Idlib buffer without fighters leaving', 15 Oct. 2018.

¹³² Hubbard, B., 'Syria urges UN to condemn rebels after apparent chemical attack', *New York Times*, 25 Nov. 2018. On allegations of chemical weapons use in Syria, see also chapter 8, section I, in this volume.

¹³³ Reuters, 'Number of displaced in southern Syria climbs to 270,000: UN', 2 July 2018; and Shaheen, K., 'Syrians stranded in "dire" desert conditions after fall of Deraa', *The Guardian*, 13 July 2018.

¹³⁴ Al-Khalidi, S., 'Jordan to hold talks with Russia over south Syria deal', Reuters, 2 July 2018; and Ibrahim, A., 'Rebels in southern Syria reach deal to end violence', Al Jazeera, 7 July 2018.

¹³⁵ Sweis, R. F. and Hubbard, B., 'Syria reopens border link to Jordan, as Assad reasserts control', *New York Times*, 15 Oct. 2018; and Human Rights Watch, 'Syria: Residents blocked from returning', 16 Oct. 2018. On refugees' attitudes to return more generally, see Yahya, M., 'Unheard voices: What Syrian refugees need to return home', Carnegie Middle East Center, 2018.

describes as Iranian assets inside Syria.¹³⁶ During air strikes on Iranian-backed forces at the T-4 air base in central Syria, an Israeli F-16 was shot down by a Syrian anti-aircraft missile, prompting further air strikes against Syria's air defences.¹³⁷ In September 2018, the Israeli Intelligence Minister, Israel Katz, claimed that 'in the last two years Israel has taken military action more than 200 times within Syria itself'.¹³⁸

The north-east

Compared to the other two conflict theatres, the north-east remained relatively stable under the control of the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), led primarily by a Kurdish-dominated armed group, the People's Protection Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel, YPG).¹³⁹ In March, Turkish-backed Syrian rebels took control of the previously Kurdish-held Afrin province, two months after Turkish troops had crossed the Syrian border to attack the city.¹⁴⁰

Throughout most of 2018, the US-backed SDF fought to retake the last territory held by the Islamic State. Despite occasional Islamic State counter-attacks and threats from Turkey against the Kurdish-led force in October, which hampered the campaign, the SDF continued to regain territory; and in mid December it captured Hajin, the last Islamic State-controlled town in eastern Syria, near the Iraqi border.¹⁴¹

On 19 December, the Trump administration announced the withdrawal of approximately 2200 US troops from Syria—against the wishes of the US Defence Secretary, James Mattis, who resigned in protest—although later reports suggested that this might only be a partial withdrawal.¹⁴² Both France and the UK also have troops in Syria.¹⁴³ However, the US withdrawal leaves the SDF/YPG potentially exposed to an attack either from Turkey (which

¹³⁶ Gross, J. A., 'Strike on Syrian air base said to target Hezbollah arms depot', *Times of Israel*, 24 May 2018.

¹³⁷ Holmes, O., 'Israel launches "large-scale" attacks in Syria after fighter jet crashes', *The Guardian*, 10 Feb. 2018.

¹³⁸ Williams, D., 'Israel says struck Iranian targets in Syria 200 times in last two years', Reuters, 4 Sep. 2018.

¹³⁹ *The Economist*, 'Can Syria's Kurds keep control of their territory?', 25 Jan. 2018.

¹⁴⁰ Gall, C. and Barnard, A., 'Syrian rebels, backed by Turkey, seize control of Afrin', *New York Times*, 18 Mar. 2018; and *The Economist*, 'After taking Afrin, Turkey looks for new targets in Syria', 22 Mar. 2018.

¹⁴¹ Bilginsoy, Z., 'Turkey strikes positions held by US-backed Kurdish fighters in northern Syria', *Military Times*, 28 Oct. 2018; Schmitt, E., 'Fight against last vestige of ISIS in Syria stalls, to dismay of US', *New York Times*, 6 Nov. 2018; and Chulov, M., 'ISIS withdraws from last urban stronghold in Syria', *The Guardian*, 14 Dec. 2018.

¹⁴² Landler, M., Cooper, H. and Schmitt, E., 'Trump to withdraw US forces from Syria, declaring "We have won against ISIS"', *New York Times*, 19 Dec. 2018; and Gibbons-Neff, T. and Schmitt, E., 'Pentagon considers using special operations forces to continue mission in Syria', *New York Times*, 21 Dec. 2018.

¹⁴³ France has around 1000 troops in Syria, while the UK has not disclosed troop numbers on the ground. See Wheeldon, T., 'As US withdraws troops from Syria, France and UK remain in the back seat', *France 24*, 23 Feb. 2019.

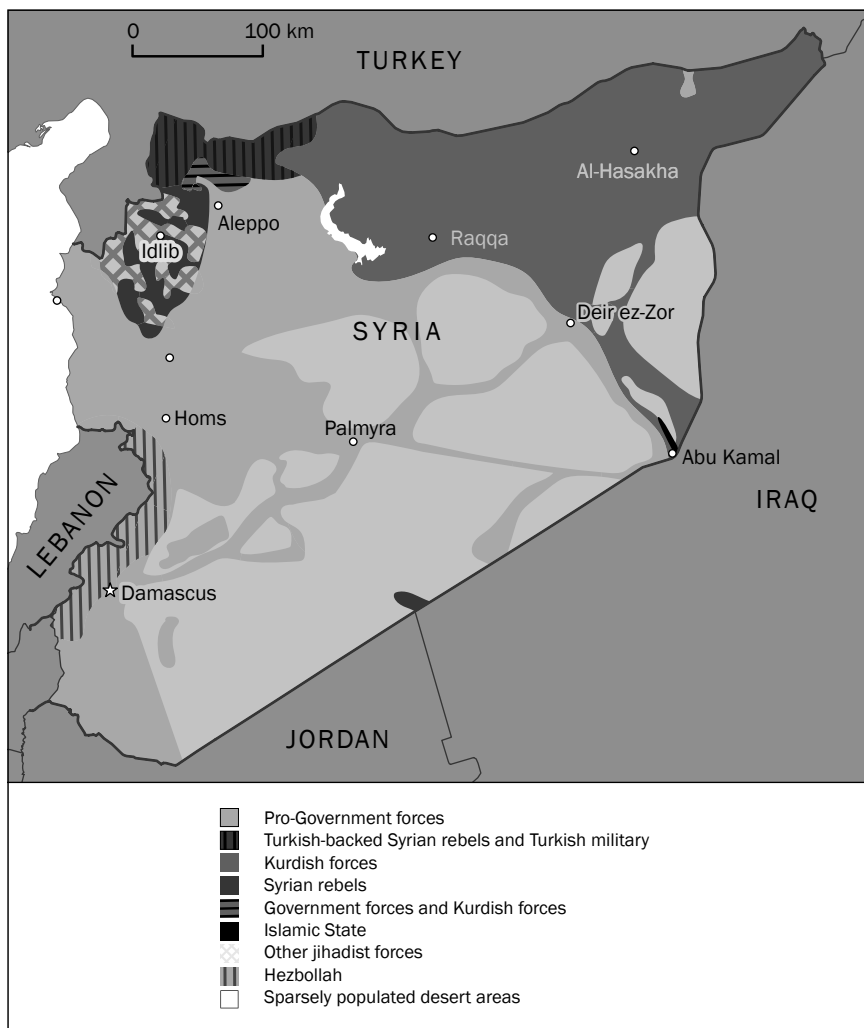


Figure 2.4. Control of territory in Syria, 31 December 2018

Credit: Hugo Ahlenius, Norpil.

Source: US Lead Inspector General, *Operation Inherent Resolve and Other Overseas Contingency Operations: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, October 1–December 31, 2018* (US Department of Defense, US Department of State and US Agency for International Development: Washington, DC), p. 25.

threatened an imminent military operation against the Kurds in northern Syria on 12 December) and Turkish-backed Syrian forces or by the Syrian

Government as it seeks to reassert control over the whole country.¹⁴⁴ The SDF has also indicated that it may have to release up to 3200 local and foreign Islamic State prisoners as a result of the US withdrawal.¹⁴⁵

The control of territory

At the end of 2018, the complexity of the war in Syria was mirrored in the control of territory by various forces (see figure 2.4). Syrian Government forces controlled southern and western Syria (about 60 per cent of the country), and Hezbollah operated in some government-controlled areas near the Lebanese border. The SDF/YPG controlled the north-east, but territory west of Manbij was contested by Syrian Government forces and Turkish-backed Syrian opposition forces. Turkey and Turkish-backed forces controlled Afrin and territory north of Manbij. Syrian rebel groups, as well as the al-Qaeda-affiliated Hayat Tahrir al Sham and Islamic State, remained in pockets of Aleppo, Hamah and Idlib provinces. The Islamic State was also present in a small part of the desert territory around Hajin.

The peace processes

Just as the conflict changed in 2018, so did the peace efforts. The UN had previously been the lead actor in peace talks, latterly in parallel with the Astana Group (Iran, Russia and Turkey). At the end of 2018, a fragile patchwork of agreements and ceasefires remained in place (mainly mediated in 2017 by the Astana Group) and the leaders of France, Germany, Russia and Turkey were involved in a new round of peace talks (the Quartet Summit).

UN-sponsored peace talks between the Syrian Government and opposition forces in 2017 had failed to make a breakthrough, but further talks were held in January 2018.¹⁴⁶ These talks and the efforts of the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, made no progress towards a political transition in Syria.¹⁴⁷ The centrepiece of UN efforts—the creation of a committee to write a new Syrian constitution—was still not in place at the end of the year.¹⁴⁸ Similarly, there was no progress in the Astana process. The eighth round of

¹⁴⁴ Turkey sees the YPG as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê, PKK) and does not want an autonomous Kurdish entity with strong links to the Kurds in Turkey on its border. El Deeb, S., 'Planned US exit from Syria scrambles tactics on crowded battlefield', Associated Press, 24 Dec. 2018; McKernan, B., 'Syrian troops mass at edge of Kurdish town threatened by Turkey', *The Guardian*, 28 Dec. 2018; and International Crisis Group (ICG), *Avoiding a Free-for-all in Syria's North East*, Middle East Briefing no. 66 (ICG: Brussels, 21 Dec. 2018).

¹⁴⁵ Saad, H. and Nordland, R., 'Kurdish fighters discuss releasing almost 3200 ISIS prisoners', *New York Times*, 20 Dec. 2018; and Al Jazeera, 'Kurdish-led forces "may not be able to contain ISIL prisoners"', 21 Dec. 2018.

¹⁴⁶ Cumming-Bruce, N., "'Golden opportunity missed": Syria peace talks falter, again', *New York Times*, 14 Dec. 2017.

¹⁴⁷ France 24, 'Does the UN's Syria peace process still have a purpose?', 25 Sep. 2018; and UN News, 'Syrian Government's "different understanding" of UN role, a "very serious challenge"—special envoy', 26 Oct. 2018.

¹⁴⁸ Al Jazeera, 'Syria constitutional committee "will not be formed" in 2018', 20 Dec. 2018.

talks in Astana in December 2017 had ended with an agreement to hold peace talks in Sochi, Russia in late January 2018.¹⁴⁹ However, most of the opposition groups refused to attend the congress, and there was no breakthrough in the negotiations.¹⁵⁰ Further rounds of the Astana process in 2018 also failed to make any significant progress.¹⁵¹ More successful were local ceasefire and de-escalation initiatives.

In May 2017, four 'de-escalation zones' had been created in western Syria in an agreement between Iran, Russia, Syria and Turkey.¹⁵² By the end of December 2018, only the one in the north-western province of Idlib remained, reinforced by the 17 September agreement between Russia and Turkey (see above). Between March and July 2018, the other three (in Homs province, eastern Ghouta and the southern border with Jordan) were recaptured by the Syrian Government with the help of Russia, using a mix of military force and negotiated surrenders. Under the terms of an earlier de-escalation agreement (announced jointly in September 2017 by Iran, Russia and Turkey in Astana), between October 2017 and May 2018 Turkey deployed troops to 12 observation points in Idlib province along the front line separating rebel forces from Syrian Government forces. These observation posts were subsequently matched by 10 Russian and 7 Iranian posts on the Syrian Government side of the line.¹⁵³

In April, Iran, Russia and Turkey met in Ankara to discuss the crafting of a new Syrian constitution and ways to enhance security in the de-escalation zones.¹⁵⁴ Meanwhile, the USA was reported to be working to assemble an Arab force to replace the remaining US forces in north-eastern Syria.¹⁵⁵ As the US administration sought to balance support for the SDF and rehabilitation of relations with Turkey, its policy messages were often ambiguous. Nonetheless, on 4 June 2018, the USA and Turkey announced a road map for defining and implementing governance and security arrangements in Manbij.¹⁵⁶ In October Turkey and the USA commenced joint patrols, and in November the US military began establishing observation posts in northern

¹⁴⁹ France 24, 'Russia, Turkey and Iran agree Syrian peace talks for January', 23 Dec. 2017.

¹⁵⁰ Barnard, A., 'Syrian peace talks in Russia: 1500 delegates, mostly pro-Assad', *New York Times*, 30 Jan. 2018; and Wintour, P., 'Russia's Syrian peace conference teeters on farce', *The Guardian*, 30 Jan. 2018.

¹⁵¹ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 'UN Syria envoy calls Astana talks on Syria "missed opportunity"', 29 Nov. 2018.

¹⁵² Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic', 6 May 2017.

¹⁵³ *Hurriyet Daily News*, 'Turkey finishes setting up observation posts in Idlib', 16 May 2018; and Markusen, M., 'Idlib province and the future of instability in Syria', Policy Brief, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Sep. 2018.

¹⁵⁴ Hafezi, P. and Erkoyun, E., 'Russia, Iran and Turkey struggle to find common ground', Reuters, 3 Apr. 2018.

¹⁵⁵ Gordon, M. R., 'US seeks Arab force and funding for Syria', *Wall Street Journal*, 16 Apr. 2018.

¹⁵⁶ International Crisis Group (ICG), 'Prospects for a deal to stabilise Syria's north east', Middle East Report no. 190 (ICG: Brussels, 5 Sep. 2018).

Syria to help Turkey secure its border.¹⁵⁷ However, the planned US troop withdrawal, announced in December, suggested that these initiatives might not continue into 2019.

Finally, with the USA increasingly sidelined, new peace talks involving the leaders of four countries—President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey, President Emmanuel Macron of France, President Vladimir Putin of Russia and Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany—took place at a summit in Istanbul on 27 October 2018. The participation of Germany and France, two countries not actively involved in previous attempts to resolve the Syrian crisis, added a new dimension to the talks, but it was unclear whether this commitment would be followed through.¹⁵⁸ The final statement of this so-called Quartet Summit called for ‘an inclusive, Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process’ and reiterated the UN’s call for the convening of the constitutional committee by the end of the year.¹⁵⁹ However, disagreements over key details remained, not least as a result of the wider regional tensions and differing perspectives of both external and internal actors. At the end of 2018, a substantive resolution of the crisis remained elusive.

Armed conflict between Turkey and the Kurds

Since August 2016, Turkey has been involved militarily in northern Syria. Having deployed troops in Idlib province in October 2017 (as part of the Astana agreement with Iran and Russia), Turkey expanded operations into Kurdish-held Afrin province in north-western Syria (see above) in January 2018. Calls for restraint from the USA and NATO allies were dismissed by President Erdoğan, who stated that he intended to stay in Syria until ‘the business is done’.¹⁶⁰

Turkish military action against Kurdish forces in northern Syria, and Turkey’s sensitivity to proposals to strengthen Kurdish forces or support some degree of Kurdish political autonomy in the area, have to be understood in the light of the conflict inside predominantly Kurdish south-eastern Turkey. This area has been the focus of an almost continuous armed confrontation between Turkish security forces and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê, PKK) since 1984, punctuated by occasional ceasefires. The collapse in July 2015 of the Kurdish–Turkish peace process (also known as the Solution process), which included a de facto ceasefire that

¹⁵⁷ Baldor, L. C., ‘US, Turkey to soon begin joint patrols in north Syria’, *Military Times*, 21 Oct. 2018; and ‘Rempfer, K., ‘The US military is putting new observation posts in northern Syria’, *Military Times*, 21 Nov. 2018.

¹⁵⁸ *Daily Sabah*, ‘Istanbul summit calls for Syrian constitution committee by year-end’, 27 Oct. 2018.

¹⁵⁹ President of Russia, ‘Joint statement by the Presidents of the Republic of Turkey, the French Republic, the Russian Federation and the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany’, 27 Oct. 2018.

¹⁶⁰ Schwartz, F., ‘Turkey’s president dismisses US call for restraint along Syria border’, *Wall Street Journal*, 22 Jan. 2018.

had been ongoing since 2013, led to a new cycle of violence.¹⁶¹ According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, between 350 000 and 500 000 people were displaced by the fighting between July 2015 and December 2016.¹⁶²

The violence continued in 2018. According to Turkish Government figures, which tend to overstate successes against the PKK, just under 1300 PKK militants were killed in thousands of security operations during 2018.¹⁶³ Two independent sources gave widely differing estimates of fatalities in 2018: according to the International Crisis Group, 563 people were killed (17 civilians, 420 PKK militants and 126 state security forces), with at least 4200 deaths in the conflict in total since July 2015, while ACLED estimated that there were 1975 fatalities from political violence in 2018 alone.¹⁶⁴ Ending this conflict is inextricably linked to the creation of peaceful relations between Turkey and the YPG in Syria, but at the close of the year there was no prospect of peace talks between the parties, especially with power in Turkey now concentrated in a strategic partnership between President Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) and the Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi).¹⁶⁵ The imprisonment since November 2016 of the co-chair of the Kurdish People's Democratic Party, Selahattin Demirtas, also harmed any chance of peace.¹⁶⁶

Armed conflict in Yemen

The roots of the current conflict and humanitarian crisis in Yemen are complex and contested.¹⁶⁷ In 2014, after several years of growing violence, the country descended into a new phase of civil war between the internationally recognized government of President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi and an uneasy alliance of Iran-backed Houthis and forces loyal to former president Ali Abdallah Saleh, which controlled the capital, Sanaa, and large parts of the country. The Houthi insurgency had begun in 2004 when Hussein Badreddin

¹⁶¹ On the role of the Kurds in Turkish politics, see Özel, S. and Yilmaz, A., 'The Kurds in the Middle East, 2015', in *SIPRI Yearbook 2016*, pp. 53–71.

¹⁶² UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'Report on the human rights situation in south-east Turkey July 2015 to December 2016', Feb. 2017.

¹⁶³ Avundukluoglu, M. E., '100 senior terrorists neutralized in 2018: Turkish min.', Anadolu Agency, 15 Nov. 2018.

¹⁶⁴ International Crisis Group, 'Turkey's PKK conflict: A visual explainer', [n.d.]; and Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 'Turkey', ACLED database.

¹⁶⁵ On the attempted military coup in Turkey in 2016, see Sahlin, M., 'Turkey's search for stability and legitimacy in 2016', *SIPRI Yearbook 2016*, pp. 151–75. Gauthier-Villars, D., 'After victory, Erdogan promises to strengthen Turkey', *Wall Street Journal*, 25 June 2018.

¹⁶⁶ Al Jazeera, 'Turkish court keeps Selahattin Demirtas in jail despite ECHR', 30 Nov. 2018.

¹⁶⁷ See Davis (note 9), pp. 80–82. See also e.g. Royal Institute of International Affairs, 'Yemen: Drivers of conflict and peace', Middle East and North Africa Programme, Chatham House, Workshop summary, 7–8 Nov. 2016; and Orkaby, A., 'Yemen's humanitarian nightmare: The real roots of the conflict', *Foreign Affairs*, Nov/Dec. 2017.

al-Houthi, the leader of the Zaidi sect, launched an uprising against the Yemeni Government. Although al-Houthi was killed in that uprising, the insurgents have been known as the Houthis since then (their official name is Ansar Allah).

In March 2015, a Saudi Arabian-led coalition intervened militarily on the side of President Hadi. Later, the coalition itself became divided by conflicts and rivalries. In addition to the UAE, the coalition has included Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Jordan, Morocco, Qatar (until 2017), Senegal and Sudan, either supplying ground troops or carrying out air strikes.¹⁶⁸ Various peace initiatives and ceasefire attempts have failed to stop the fighting, and by the end of 2017 the coalition's partial blockade of Houthi-controlled territories was having devastating humanitarian consequences.

In addition to this civil war, mainly located in the north, there were two other separate but interlinked conflicts in Yemen. First, another civil war was taking place between the central government and the Southern Movement, a fragile coalition of separatist groups operating in Aden, Hadramaut and Shebwa in the south. In January 2018, for example, the Southern Movement fought government forces in the port city of Aden, where the Yemeni Government has been based since 2015.¹⁶⁹ The Southern Movement is represented politically by the Southern Transitional Council, which was founded in May 2017 by a former Aden governor, Aydrus al-Zubaydi, after he was fired by President Hadi. Second, a nationwide counterterrorism campaign continued against radical Islamist groups, including al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.¹⁷⁰ The USA has been carrying out regular air strikes against al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (or its antecedents) in Yemen since at least 2009. From 2014–18, the USA carried out at least 238 air strikes causing between 16 and 41 civilian deaths.¹⁷¹

The humanitarian crisis

The humanitarian conditions in Yemen worsened in 2018 and, according to the UN, remained the worst in the world. In addition to a cholera epidemic—more than 1.36 million suspected cases between late 2016 and December 2018, and nearly 2800 associated deaths—an estimated 80 per cent of the population (24 million people) required some form of humanitarian or protection assistance, including 14.3 million in acute need (i.e. at risk from famine). In 2018 the number of people in acute need increased by 27 per

¹⁶⁸ On the role played by the UAE, see Abdul-Ahad, G., 'Yemen on the brink: How the UAE is profiting from the chaos of civil war', *The Guardian*, 21 Dec. 2018.

¹⁶⁹ *The Economist*, 'A rebellion in Aden is hastening the break-up of Yemen', 1 Feb. 2018; and BBC News, 'Yemen war: Deadly infighting rages in Aden', 29 Jan. 2018.

¹⁷⁰ Kendall, E., 'Contemporary jihadi militancy in Yemen: How is the threat evolving?', Middle East Institute, Policy Paper 2018-7, July 2018.

¹⁷¹ Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 'Drone strikes in Yemen', [n.d.].

cent compared with 2017, and the UN warned that the Yemeni crisis ‘could become the worst famine in 100 years’.¹⁷² One aid agency estimated that 85 000 children under five years old had starved to death in Yemen since 2015.¹⁷³ An estimated 3.3 million people remain displaced, up from 2.2 million in 2017, including 685 000 people who fled fighting in Houthi-controlled Hodeidah, the fourth largest city in Yemen and its principal port on the Red Sea, and in other areas on the west coast from June onwards (see below).¹⁷⁴

As the conflict intensified in 2018—ACLED recorded a 25 per cent increase in the number of organized violent political incidents during the year compared with 2017—there was an increase in indiscriminate attacks and potential violations of international humanitarian law, which created large numbers of civilian casualties.¹⁷⁵ ACLED estimates that over 60 000 people have been killed in the Yemeni war since 2016, including approximately 30 700 fatalities in 2018.¹⁷⁶ A UN Human Rights Office monitoring programme verified more than 17 700 civilian casualties (6872 killed and 10 768 injured) in Yemen between 26 March 2015 and 8 November 2018.¹⁷⁷ All of these estimates almost certainly undercount the true extent of casualties and exclude deaths from disease, malnutrition and other consequences of the crisis.

Armed conflict in 2018

Four years into the current conflict, the focus shifted to two theatres: (a) the Red Sea coast, where government forces backed by the UAE pushed up from the south and threatened Hodeidah, through which over 70 per cent of the country’s food is imported; and (b) the Saudi Arabian–Yemeni border, where conflict intensified, including increased Houthi missile strikes targeting cities in Saudi Arabia, especially the capital, Riyadh.

Allies of the Yemeni Government have received substantial international support. US special forces were deployed to Saudi Arabia in December 2017 to help it locate and destroy Houthi ballistic missiles and launch sites.¹⁷⁸ US assistance has included intelligence, training and arms sales.¹⁷⁹ France,

¹⁷² UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, ‘2019 humanitarian needs overview: Yemen’; and BBC News, ‘Yemen could be “worst famine in 100 years”’, 15 Oct. 2018.

¹⁷³ McKernan, B., ‘Yemen: Up to 85 000 young children dead from starvation’, *The Guardian*, 21 Nov. 2018.

¹⁷⁴ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (note 172).

¹⁷⁵ Kishi and Pavlik (note 50).

¹⁷⁶ Kishi and Pavlik (note 50); and Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), ‘Yemen war death toll now exceeds 60 000 according to latest ACLED data’, Press release, 11 Dec. 2018.

¹⁷⁷ UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, ‘Bachelet urges states with the power and influence to end starvation, killing of civilians in Yemen’, News release, 10 Nov. 2018.

¹⁷⁸ Cooper, H., Gibbons-Neff, T. and Schmitt, E., ‘Army special forces secretly help Saudis combat threat from Yemen rebels’, *New York Times*, 3 May 2018.

¹⁷⁹ On US and British assistance to the coalition, see Bachman, J. S., ‘A “synchronised attack” on life: The Saudi-led coalition’s “hidden and holistic” genocide in Yemen and the shared responsibility of the US and UK’, *Third World Quarterly*, 2019.

the UK and other European countries have also been key suppliers of major weapon systems to Saudi Arabia and the UAE.¹⁸⁰

Houthi forces had been carrying out ballistic missile attacks on targets in Saudi Arabia since late 2016. Four ballistic missile launches were confirmed in 2017 and at least 11 in 2018—all in the first half of the year.¹⁸¹ In April, the conflict intensified: the Saudi Arabian-led coalition increased its air strikes, and Houthi forces increased missile attacks on Saudi Arabian targets.¹⁸²

In June, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and other Yemeni Government allies launched an offensive to take Hodeidah, with the USA providing intelligence to coalition forces for air strike targets.¹⁸³ The coalition forces reportedly seized Hodeidah airport on 16 June, although fighting around the airport was ongoing four days later (and commenced again in November).¹⁸⁴ On 23 June, the UAE announced a pause in the assault on Hodeidah to allow for UN-brokered talks, which were to culminate in a meeting between the two sides in Geneva, Switzerland in September.¹⁸⁵ In the meantime, fighting continued at key locations on the outskirts of the city, with air strikes by the Saudi Arabian-led coalition causing widespread civilian deaths. On 2 August, for example, at least 30 people were killed in air strikes, and on 9 August, 51 people, including 40 children, were killed in an air strike that hit a school bus.¹⁸⁶ The 500-pound laser-guided MK82 bomb used in the 9 August attack was manufactured by the US company Lockheed Martin.¹⁸⁷

The coalition had created a mechanism for investigating such incidents in August 2016—the Joint Incidents Assessment Team—but, in an August 2018 report, Human Rights Watch criticized it as falling short of international standards and lacking credibility. The organization also warned France, the

¹⁸⁰ Cochrane, P., 'EU countries approve arms sales to Saudi, UAE worth 55 times aid to Yemen', *Middle East Eye*, 12 Nov. 2018; and Spencer, R., 'Britain's divisive role in Yemen conflict', *The Times*, 8 Mar. 2018. On arms transfers to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, see also chapter 5, sections II and III, in this volume.

¹⁸¹ United Nations, Security Council, Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen, S/2019/83, 25 Jan. 2019.

¹⁸² Almosawa, S., 'Wedding is hit by airstrike in Yemen, killing more than 20', *New York Times*, 23 Apr. 2018. On accusations of Iranian support and provision of missiles and other weapons to the Houthis, see Schmitt, E., 'Iran is smuggling increasingly potent weapons into Yemen, US admiral says', *New York Times*, 18 Sep. 2017.

¹⁸³ *The Economist*, 'The battle begins for Hodeida, Yemen's lifeline', 14 June 2018; McKirdy, E. and Qiblawi, T., 'Saudi-led forces begin attack on Yemen port city, ignoring UN warnings', CNN, 14 June 2018; and Nissenbaum, D., 'US deepens role in Yemen fight, offers Gulf allies airstrike-target assistance', *Wall Street Journal*, 12 June 2018.

¹⁸⁴ Associated Press, 'Saudi-led forces "seize airport in Yemen city of Hodeidah"', *The Telegraph*, 16 June 2018; and Fitch, A., 'Saudi coalition beats back Houthi rebels from Hodeidah airport', *Wall Street Journal*, 20 June 2018.

¹⁸⁵ Associated Press, 'UAE official acknowledges "pause" in campaign for Yemen port', 1 July 2018.

¹⁸⁶ Kalfod, M. A. and Coker, M., 'Saudis escalate siege of port in Yemen, alarming aid groups', *New York Times*, 2 Aug. 2018; and Borger, J., 'US supplied bomb that killed 40 children on Yemen school bus', *The Guardian*, 19 Aug. 2018.

¹⁸⁷ Elbagir, N. et al., 'Bomb that killed 40 children in Yemen was supplied by the US', CNN, 17 Aug. 2018.

UK and the USA that they risked complicity in unlawful attacks in Yemen by continuing to supply arms to Saudi Arabia.¹⁸⁸ In another report in August 2018, the UN Group of Regional and International Eminent Experts on Yemen accused the military coalition of committing or enabling war crimes in Yemen. While noting that numerous crimes were also committed by the Houthis, the report (covering September 2014 to June 2018) singled out Saudi Arabian and UAE air strikes as causing the most civilian casualties.¹⁸⁹

The UN-mediated talks collapsed on 9 September, the Houthis having failed to attend for three consecutive days. After that, fighting escalated again and continued through October.¹⁹⁰ At the beginning of November, the coalition deployed approximately 10 000 additional troops in a new offensive.¹⁹¹ On 14 November, there was another temporary pause in the coalition's advance on Hodeidah, following increasing international pressure and intense UN shuttle diplomacy.¹⁹² Nonetheless, sporadic fighting continued until a UN-brokered ceasefire was agreed on 13 December.

The peace process

Yemeni peace talks had stalled since the collapse of negotiations in Kuwait in 2016. The UN Special Envoy to Yemen, Ismail Ould Sheikh Ahmed (Mauritania), presided over three rounds of unsuccessful talks in February 2018 and then stepped down to be replaced by Martin Griffiths (UK).¹⁹³ Meanwhile, the focus was on the international humanitarian response, and in April a pledging conference in Geneva convened by the UN Secretary-General raised \$2 billion in pledges for humanitarian action (about half from Saudi Arabia and the UAE).¹⁹⁴

From June 2018, intermittent efforts to revive the peace talks took place in parallel with the military advance on Hodeidah described above. The UN Special Envoy sought to get the Houthis and the internationally recognized

¹⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch, *Hiding Behind the Coalition: Failure to Credibly Investigate and Provide Redress for Unlawful Attacks in Yemen* (Human Rights Watch: New York, Aug. 2018).

¹⁸⁹ Human Rights Council, 'Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014', 17 Aug. 2018, A/HRC/39/43. On evidence of widespread torture in prisons controlled by the Houthis in Yemen, see Michael, M., 'Ex-inmates: Torture rife in prisons run by Yemen rebels', Associated Press, 7 Dec. 2018.

¹⁹⁰ Wintour, P., 'Saudi-led forces renew push to take key Yemen port from Houthi rebels', *The Guardian*, 11 Sep. 2018; and Salisbury, P., 'Yemen's Hodeida offensive: Once avoidable, now imminent', Commentary, International Crisis Group, 20 Sep. 2018.

¹⁹¹ Aldroubi, M., 'Arab coalition to send 10 000 troops to liberate Hodeidah from Houthis', *The National*, 30 Oct. 2018; and BBC News, 'Yemen war: Battle for vital port of Hudaydah intensifies', 7 Nov. 2018.

¹⁹² Fitch, A. and Al-Batati, S., 'Saudis halt Yemen offensive as international pressure mounts', *Wall Street Journal*, 15 Nov. 2018.

¹⁹³ United Nations, 'Secretary-General appoints Martin Griffiths of United Kingdom as his special envoy for Yemen', News release, 16 Feb. 2018; and Reinl, J., 'Who is Martin Griffiths, UN's new envoy to Yemen?', Middle East Eye, 23 Feb. 2018.

¹⁹⁴ Beaumont, P., 'Saudi Arabia and UAE pledge nearly \$1bn in aid for Yemen at UN conference', *The Guardian*, 3 Apr. 2018.

Yemeni Government of President Hadi to agree to a new framework plan in September, but the Houthis failed to turn up to pre-peace talk consultations in Geneva. The murder of a Saudi Arabian journalist, Jamal Khashoggi, in October (see 'Key general developments' above) produced a backlash against Saudi Arabian policies and prompted Western powers to begin applying political pressure on the Gulf coalition. In late October, the US Secretary of Defence, James Mattis, the US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, and the British Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, all separately called for a de-escalation of hostilities and a resumption of talks.¹⁹⁵ On 9 November, the USA suspended aerial refuelling for coalition aircraft conducting air raids in Yemen, although the decision fell well short of a goal with growing bipartisan support in the USA of ending all support for the war.¹⁹⁶ The UN Special Envoy, Griffiths, used this momentum to reschedule peace negotiations, which finally took place in Stockholm, Sweden from 6–13 December. The Houthis agreed to attend the peace talks after the coalition approved the medical evacuation of some of their wounded.¹⁹⁷

The negotiations culminated in the Stockholm Agreement between the Houthis and the Yemeni Government, which included several confidence-building measures: a commitment to exchange almost 5000 prisoners, an immediate ceasefire across the governorate of Hodeidah, demilitarization of the Red Sea trade corridor, transfer of Hodeidah port to UN management, and the reopening of a humanitarian corridor linking Hodeidah with Sanaa.¹⁹⁸ A small UN monitoring mission is expected to oversee the ceasefire, which came into effect on 18 December after a brief delay.¹⁹⁹ The Redeployment Coordination Committee, a Houthi–Hadi working group formed to implement the Hodeidah part of the Stockholm Agreement, met for the first time in late December.

The parties were due to meet again in January 2019 to discuss the contested city of Taiz and a framework for negotiations to end the war. Despite cautious optimism after the talks in Sweden, the way forward remained fraught with risk as the parties sought to bridge their significant

¹⁹⁵ Harris, G., Schmitt, E. and Gladstone, R., 'US and Britain seek Yemen cease-fire as relations with Saudis cool', *New York Times*, 31 Oct. 2018; and *The Economist*, 'A hint of hope for a ceasefire in Yemen', 1 Nov. 2018.

¹⁹⁶ Rodrigo, C. M., 'US to stop refueling Saudi planes in Yemen', *The Hill*, 9 Nov. 2018; and Harris, G. et al., 'Senators, furious over Khashoggi killing, spurn president on war in Yemen', *New York Times*, 28 Nov. 2018.

¹⁹⁷ Ghobari, M. and Yaakoubi, A. E., 'Yemen talks set to start in Sweden after wounded Houthis evacuated', *Reuters*, 2 Dec. 2018.

¹⁹⁸ Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, 'Full text of the Stockholm Agreement', 13 Dec. 2018; and Walsh, D., 'Yemen peace talks begin with agreement to free 5 000 prisoners', *New York Times*, 6 Dec. 2018.

¹⁹⁹ McKernan, B., 'UN Yemen mission to rush to Hodeidah to oversee ceasefire', *The Guardian*, 14 Dec. 2018; and BBC News, 'Yemen crisis: Hudaydah ceasefire delayed after clashes', 16 Dec. 2018. On the UN mission to Yemen, see chapter 3, section II, in this volume.

differences on issues ranging from disarmament and demobilization to the terms of a post-war settlement.²⁰⁰ Extending the peace process to include the Southern Transitional Council is another challenge.²⁰¹ The support of external powers in restraining their proxies on the ground will be crucial. To this end, the US Senate passed a motion (by 56 votes to 41) on 13 December calling for an end to US military support to the Saudi Arabian-led coalition in Yemen. While the resolution still faced serious obstacles to becoming law, it marked a potential sea change in US policy towards the conflict.²⁰² A British-sponsored UN Security Council resolution on the conflict, under consideration since October, was expected to be voted on early in 2019 and to provide international support for the Stockholm Agreement.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Salisbury, P., 'Making Yemen's Hodeida deal stick', International Crisis Group, 19 Dec. 2018.

²⁰¹ Forster, R., 'Yemen's peace process: Dilemmas facing the Southern Transitional Council', Oxford Research Group, 27 Nov. 2018.

²⁰² Borger, J., 'Senate votes to end US military support for Saudis in Yemen', *The Guardian*, 13 Dec. 2018.

²⁰³ Borger, J., 'Yemen ceasefire resolution blocked at UN after Saudi and UAE "blackmail"', *The Guardian*, 29 Nov. 2018; and Salisbury, P., 'After progress in Sweden, Yemen needs a UN Security Council resolution', Commentary, International Crisis Group, 13 Dec. 2018.