

## 2. Armed conflict and conflict management

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### I. Introduction

In 2024 the global armed conflict landscape continued to deteriorate, with large-scale violence across multiple regions.<sup>1</sup> More people were killed in armed conflict, were forced from their homes or needed humanitarian assistance than in recent years, probably for decades.<sup>2</sup> On many battlefronts, peacemaking was non-existent or stalled.

Perhaps the most pronounced change in armed conflict since 2021 has been the return of large-scale conventional interstate warfare in Europe and cross-border state-led military aggression in the Middle East. This has led diplomats, analysts and the media to shift attention to the macro-level and global geopolitics and so pay less attention to the post-cold war trend of intra-state conflicts and low-intensity violence. For example, at the United Nations General Assembly's annual high-level debate in September 2024, 144 states referred to the situation in the Middle East and North Africa; 116 referred to the war in Ukraine (51 of them without naming the Russian Federation as a party to the conflict); and only 60 referenced the civil war in Sudan.<sup>3</sup> However, although comprehensive conflict or 'total war' has returned, limited warfare and low level violence have not gone away.<sup>4</sup> This chapter demonstrates that the array of features that shape armed conflict show both continuities and variation in recent years.

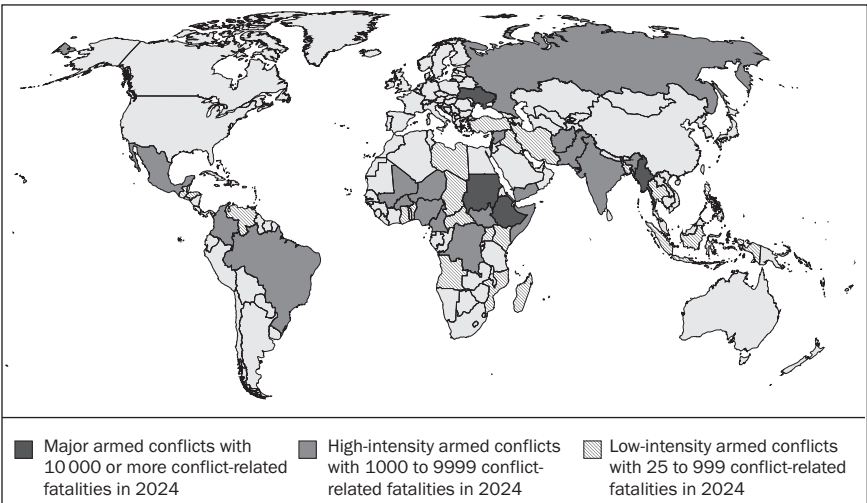
Although the number of locations of armed conflict fell slightly, from 51 states in 2023 to 49 in 2024 (see section II of this chapter), two major wars—those between Russia and Ukraine and between Israel and Hamas—expanded gravely in 2024. Israel entered into direct conflict with Hezbollah in Lebanon and with Iran, while the Russia–Ukraine war expanded beyond the existing supplies of arms and assistance by supporters on both sides to

<sup>1</sup> Armed conflict is defined here to mean the use of armed force between 2 or more states or non-state armed groups. An armed conflict is considered to be active in a given year if battle-related violence causes 25 or more deaths in that year or, exceptionally, if fatalities from 'explosions and remote violence' exceed 100. For further details see the notes to table 2.10 below.

<sup>2</sup> On recent fatalities see table 2.1; for longer-term trends (1989–2023) see Uppsala University, 'UCDP: Record number of armed conflicts in the world', Press release, 3 June 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Gowan, R. and Boccon-Gibod, C., 'The conflicts competing for attention at the United Nations', International Crisis Group (ICG), 31 Oct. 2024. See also Tisdall, S., 'The world at war: The flashpoints that the west ignores', *The Guardian*, 2 Feb. 2025.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. Karlin, M., 'The return of total war', *Foreign Affairs*, Nov./Dec. 2024.



**Figure 2.1.** Armed conflicts by number of estimated conflict-related deaths, 2024

Source: ACLED Explorer, accessed 28 Jan. 2025.

the direct deployment of over 10 000 troops from the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea) to help the Russian military drive back Ukraine’s offensive in Russia’s Kursk oblast.<sup>5</sup> Either of these separate regional conflicts or the tensions in East Asia has the potential to expand further into a wider regional war or to merge with other conflicts into a global conflict. Although this still seemed unlikely at the end of 2024, the hardening and consolidating of alliances that took place during the year around the world showed that the risk was rising.<sup>6</sup> The sudden fall of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in December added another layer of uncertainty and potentially an end to the 13-year Syrian civil war.

This chapter continues with overviews of global trends in armed conflict (section II) followed by peace processes and peace operations (section III). Sections IV–VIII offer short surveys of the conflict dynamics in each region (the Americas, Asia and Oceania, Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa). While the focus is on specific countries within those regions—in the sense of where armed conflicts are unfolding—some of the conflict actors may be based or originate from outside those specific countries or regions. Section IX draws some conclusions and is followed by a table detailing active armed conflicts in 2024 (table 2.10).

<sup>5</sup> US Department of Defense, ‘Pentagon says 10K North Korean troops in Kursk oblast’, 4 Nov. 2024.

<sup>6</sup> Poast, P., ‘A rush to form alliances is always a bad sign’, World Politics Review, 28 June 2024.

## II. Global trends in armed conflicts

This section first reviews the conflict-related fatality data provided by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) project. It then explores conflict changes and continuities along five dimensions: (a) the actors involved; (b) the domains where armed conflict occurs; (c) the methods used; (d) the resources that fuel armed conflict; and (e) the impacts that armed conflict have on people and societies (the last dimension being contingent on the first four).<sup>7</sup>

There were some notable continuities in levels of conflict worldwide between 2024 and recent years, as tracked by ACLED. The fighting in most of the 49 states experiencing armed conflict (see figure 2.1) continued to be internal—involving forces of the government and non-state armed groups—rather than against another state.<sup>8</sup> There were only three interstate armed conflicts during the year, entangling seven states (India–Pakistan, Iran–Israel and Russia–Ukraine, which also involved North Korea), although a fourth conflict, the Israel–Hamas war, fell in a grey zone as it involved the broader Palestinian conflict between a state and an actor aspiring to statehood. The geographical distribution of countries in armed conflict was also similar to previous years, with the highest number located in sub-Saharan Africa (21), followed by the Americas (10), Asia and Oceania (8), the Middle East and North Africa (8), and Europe (2). Nonetheless, these apparent continuities obscure some significant changes in the overall lethality of conflicts and death rates across regions and conflicts.

### Conflict-related fatalities in 2024

The estimated overall number of fatalities recorded by ACLED rose from 188 000 in 2023 to 239 000 in 2024 (see table 2.1), the highest total in the period 2018–24 for which consistent data is available. Notably, this period includes 2018, when the civil war in Afghanistan and conflicts in the Middle East were claiming high death tolls. All the fatalities data in this chapter should, however, be treated as tentative as information on conflict fatalities is unreliable.<sup>9</sup> According to Uppsala University, which has been collecting data on deaths in conflicts since 1989, the most recent three years (2021–23) were

<sup>7</sup> The theoretical framework for these 5 dimensions is set out in Idler, A., 'Change in armed conflict: An introduction', *International Political Science Review*, vol. 45, no.1 (Jan. 2024).

<sup>8</sup> A country is treated as being in an armed conflict in a given year if there were 25 or more battle-related deaths in that year or, exceptionally (as was the case of Saudi Arabia in 2023), when fatalities in the 'explosions and remote violence' category exceed 100. See also note 1.

<sup>9</sup> Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED), 'Fatalities: Uses and limitations of ACLED data', 7 May 2024. On casualty counting see also Giger, A., 'Casualty recording in armed conflict: Methods and normative issues', *SIPRI Yearbook 2016*; and Carpenter, C., 'The UN and the media are both getting casualty counts in Gaza wrong', *World Politics Review*, 22 May 2024.

**Table 2.1.** Estimated conflict-related fatalities, by region, 2018–24

Fatality figures are collated from 4 event types: battles; explosions and remote violence; protests, riots and strategic developments; and violence against civilians.<sup>a</sup> Figures include all conflict-related fatalities in the region, irrespective of whether the countries were classified as being in armed conflict.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Americas	25 454	24 133	21 688	22 052	23 431	23 530	22 337
Asia and Oceania	49 745	48 877	36 495	58 886	32 375	27 792	27 513
Europe	1 098	491	7 321	285	34 546	37 045	77 771
Middle East and North Africa	75 412	52 782	34 133	28 488	16 604	35 019	44 317
Sub-Saharan Africa	26 941	27 843	39 208	49 644	53 893	64 954	67 215
<b>Total</b>	<b>178 650</b>	<b>154 126</b>	<b>138 845</b>	<b>159 355</b>	<b>160 849</b>	<b>188 340</b>	<b>239 153</b>

<sup>a</sup> Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), 'Armed Conflict Location & Event Data codebook', 3 Oct. 2024.

Source: ACLED Explorer, accessed 28 Jan. 2025.

among the four deadliest in the 34-year period, with only 1994 being more lethal (due to the Rwandan genocide).<sup>10</sup>

Europe was the region with the highest level of conflict-related fatalities in 2024, having been the region with the lowest number during 2018–21. The doubling of estimated conflict-related fatalities in Europe was due to the increased intensity of the Russia–Ukraine war in 2024. The 3.5 per cent rise in estimated fatalities in sub-Saharan Africa was primarily associated with the war in Ethiopia, and the 27 per cent increase in the Middle East and North Africa was tied to the deepening and widening of the Israel–Hamas war. In contrast, there were small drops in the numbers of estimated fatalities in the Americas and in Asia and Oceania. The fatality rate in the latter has more than halved since 2021, despite the ongoing civil war in Myanmar. This reflects the relative lack of violence in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover in 2021.

Despite uncertainties in fatality statistics, ACLED data indicates that the number of wars involving large-scale killing increased in 2024. There were five major armed conflicts in the year (i.e. involving over 10 000 reported deaths): the Israel–Hamas and Russia–Ukraine wars, the civil wars in Myanmar and Sudan, and the subnational armed conflicts in Ethiopia. This was one more than in 2023. The number of high-intensity conflicts (i.e. claiming 1000–9999 lives) reduced from 20 in 2023 to 19 in 2024 (see figure 2.1). All five major armed conflicts and most of the high-intensity armed conflicts were internationalized, involving foreign actors, which may have led to the conflict being prolonged or exacerbated.

<sup>10</sup> Uppsala University (note 2). At the time of writing, the latest year covered by the Uppsala data was 2023.

ACLED's data also offers support for the thesis that armed conflict is growing more prevalent and more lethal in some regions. The region-by-region analysis in sections III–VII also shows that, even in areas where conflict-related fatalities are relatively low, there are significant cases of violence and coercion within and between states. In some cases, such as Europe and the Asia-Pacific region, the risks of conflict escalating further—whether in terms of violence or geographical scope—loomed large.

## Actors

Current armed conflicts often involve multiple armed actors—both states and non-state actors—in constantly evolving relationships, including the use of proxy forces by major powers and nearby states to pursue their agendas. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) estimates that around 450 armed groups were active around the world in 2024 (195 in Africa, 89 in the Near and Middle East, 84 in the Americas, 76 in Asia and the Pacific, and 11 in Eurasia), with at least 130 of them considered to be parties to an intrastate armed conflict.<sup>11</sup> According to the ICRC, an estimated 210 million people resided in areas fully controlled or contested by such groups, 19 million more than in 2023. Recruitment into and exit from armed groups is influenced by an array of personal, communal or familial, and structural factors.<sup>12</sup> Despite the large numbers of non-state armed groups, state forces remained the most powerful and violent actors in 2024: they were responsible for 62 per cent of all estimated conflict-related fatalities in 2024 (up from 56 per cent in 2023).<sup>13</sup>

In some cases the number of conflict actors has grown due to fragmentation of existing groups or through alliance formation drawing in new groups. In the Russia–Ukraine war, for example, mercenaries from the former Wagner Group (now largely rebranded as Africa Corps), tens of thousands of convicts and North Korean troops have fought on Russia's side, while Ukraine's regular armed forces are fighting alongside cadres of international volunteers in numbers probably not seen since the 1936–39 Spanish Civil War.<sup>14</sup>

The contested issue that originally instigated a conflict may mutate too, triggering new conflict actors. In the Middle East and North Africa, for

<sup>11</sup> Bamber-Zryd, M., 'ICRC engagement with armed groups in 2024', Humanitarian Law & Policy, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 31 Oct. 2024.

<sup>12</sup> E.g. Cohen, N. and Madhuraj, A., *Disengaging from Armed Groups and Desisting from Conflict Activities: Drawing Lessons Learned from Criminology*, Managing Exits from Armed Conflict Findings Report no. 34 (UNIDIR: Geneva, 2024).

<sup>13</sup> ACLED Explorer, accessed 28 Jan. 2025.

<sup>14</sup> On estimated foreign volunteers in Ukraine (4000–20 000) and in the Spanish Civil War (c. 35 000) see Manley, C., 'Ukraine was a magnet for foreign fighters. After 2 bruising years, many are disillusioned or dead', Business Insider, 11 May 2024; and Roos, D., 'Why so many foreigners volunteered to fight in the Spanish Civil War', History, 4 Mar. 2022. On the role of the Wagner Group and the use of convicts in the war see Caparini, C., 'The role of the Wagner Group and other Russian private military and security companies in armed conflicts in 2023', *SIPRI Yearbook 2024*.

example, multiple state militaries are increasingly fighting against or with the Houthis, including through naval engagements, because of the spillover from the Israel–Hamas war (see section VII). The transnational nature of some actors can also trigger new conflicts. The armed conflict in the Lake Chad Basin started with the Boko Haram insurgency in north-eastern Nigeria, expanded to central Nigeria, contracted, then shifted back to the north-east and crossed the borders with Chad, Niger and Cameroon in a series of escalating inter-factional conflicts.<sup>15</sup>

Fragmentation of conflict actors combined with the multiplication of actors attempting to mediate has also been a feature of several armed conflicts, including those in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Iraq, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria and Ukraine.

## Domains

The domains in which armed conflicts take place can also differ and change over time. It can be a physical domain (i.e. air, land, space and sea) or non-physical (i.e. cyber). It might be densely populated (e.g. cities) or sparsely populated (e.g. rural areas, sea and outer space).

Concern about urban warfare and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA) has been growing in recent years, and in 2022 it led many states to make a political commitment to strengthen the protection of civilians in that environment.<sup>16</sup> The maritime domain has also once again become a site of direct conflict, with Ukraine sinking or damaging 26 Russian ships in the Black Sea, and Houthi attacks affecting commercial shipping in the Red Sea.<sup>17</sup> Undersea cable vulnerability became a pressing transatlantic security issue in 2024.<sup>18</sup> Cyberspace has also become an important conflict theatre, although its broader impact on most armed conflicts remains relatively low.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Batault, F. et al., *Prospects for Dialogue and Negotiation to Address the Conflict in the Lake Chad Basin* (UNIDIR: Geneva, May 2024).

<sup>16</sup> Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas, Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, 17 June 2022. On the EWIPA Declaration and the role and impact of EWIPA in 2024 see chapter II, section II, in this volume. See also Williams, M. and Cheng, M., 'The future of urban warfare', *Irregular Warfare Initiative*, 9 Mar. 2023.

<sup>17</sup> Williams, B. G., 'How the Ukrainians—with no navy—defeated Russia's Black Sea Fleet', *The Conversation*, 19 July 2024; and US Defense Intelligence Agency, 'Yemen: Houthi attacks placing pressure on international trade', Apr. 2024.

<sup>18</sup> E.g. US Department of State, 'Joint statement on the security and resilience of undersea cables in a globally digitalized world', 26 Sep. 2024.

<sup>19</sup> On the limitations of cyber operations in e.g. the Russia–Ukraine war see Maschmeyer, L., 'Cyber conflict and subversion in the Russia–Ukraine war', *Lawfare*, 11 June 2024; and Willett, M., *Cyber Operations and Their Responsible Use*, Adelphi Series nos 511–13 (Routledge: London, 2024), chapter 3. On the impact of cyberattacks more generally and attempts to regulate this domain see chapter 13, sections II and III, in this volume.

In terms of physical territory, armed conflicts often fail to respect international borders because of transnational actors and often several conflicts form zones of instability, such as in the Sahel and the Great Lakes region. Technological advances and global supply chains also connect armed conflicts across regions and continents. Changes in the fortunes of actors may also facilitate shifts of armed violence either to cities or to sparsely populated spaces if these environments offer a conflict actor new opportunities. For example, the Islamic State group, which previously controlled large swathes of Iraq and Syria, has sought to rebuild its power and relevance in the hinterlands of the two countries.<sup>20</sup>

## Methods

Methods of armed conflict constantly evolve but also retain many continuities. Fighting is often intermittent, with a wide range of intensities and brief ceasefires.

State militaries increasingly rely on digital technologies, data centres and satellites to conduct operations. Meanwhile, globalization has extended these communications technologies and infrastructures to non-state armed groups, allowing them to recruit fighters from afar or spread propaganda using social media. Civilians living through wars also rely on digital networks and devices for access to essential services and information.

One of the key trends of 2024 was the shifting methodology of violence. Explosions and remote violence—that is, explosive devices (including bombs, grenades and improvised explosive devices, IEDs), artillery fire or shelling, missile attacks, air strikes or strikes by uncrewed aerial vehicles (UAVs), and other widely destructive heavy weapons—accounted for over 98 000 incidents in 2024. This was an increase of 42 per cent compared to 2023 and nearly two times the number of armed clashes (see table 2.2).<sup>21</sup> This trend underscores a growing reliance on remote and indiscriminate weapons and tactics in warfare, with harmful consequences for civilian populations. The Middle East, Ukraine and the Sahel are areas that were subject to particularly high levels of explosions and remote violence.<sup>22</sup>

### *Weapon systems*

The rapid pace of technological change has led to developments in weapon technologies and their spread to non-state armed groups. However, most armed conflicts in 2024 were fought with traditional forms of weaponry.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas, C., 'The Islamic State: Background, current status, and US policy', In Focus IF10328, US Congress, Congressional Research Service (CRS), 6 May 2024.

<sup>21</sup> On the use of missiles and UAVs in 2024 see chapter 7, sections II and III, in this volume. On the use of explosive weapons in populated areas see chapter 11, section II, in this volume.

<sup>22</sup> E.g. ACLED, 'Conflict watchlist, 2025', 12 Dec. 2024.

**Table 2.2.** Categories of conflict-related violence, 2022–24

Event type <sup>a</sup>	Events				Fatalities <sup>b</sup>			
	2022	2023	2024	Change, 2023–24 (%)	2022	2023	2024	Change, 2023–24 (%)
Battles	37 223	44 000	52 534	19	75 834	96 094	140 423	46
Explosions and remote violence	54 243	69 111	98 193	42	38 508	49 813	56 578	14
Protests, riots and strategic developments	187 607	190 267	194 996	2.5	4 399	4 456	4 278	–4.0
Violence against civilians	35 455	34 592	33 521	–3.1	42 108	37 977	37 874	–0.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>314 528</b>	<b>337 970</b>	<b>379 244</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>160 849</b>	<b>188 340</b>	<b>239 153</b>	<b>27</b>

<sup>a</sup> For definitions of event types see Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), ‘Armed Conflict Location & Event Data codebook’, 3 Oct. 2024.

<sup>b</sup> These figures include all conflict-related fatalities, irrespective of whether the countries were engaged in armed conflict.

Source: ACLED Explorer, accessed 28 Jan. 2025.

The Russia–Ukraine war showed that such arms (especially artillery) with ‘boots on the ground’ remain central to interstate armed conflict. However, it has also been a war in which robot dogs, cyber weapons and armed UAVs were deployed alongside attritional trench warfare and the threatened use of nuclear weapons.<sup>23</sup> The protracted Russia–Ukraine war also suggests that the post-cold war trend from mass towards precision (i.e. small numbers of high-end weapons) may be morphing into a ‘precise mass strategy’ with the use of uncrewed, cheaper systems at greater scale.<sup>24</sup>

*Terrorism*

There is no single internationally accepted definition of what constitutes terrorism. In the absence of an agreed definition, it is recognized that states sometimes identify ‘terrorist’ suspects in the light of their own national interests, while others may consider the same actors to be insurgents or fighting for self-determination. Nonetheless, separate data on global trends and patterns in terrorism highlight that terrorism remains a key methodology and a serious global threat.

The Global Terrorism Index 2025 reports that 7555 people died from terrorism globally in 2024, a 13 per cent reduction from the previous year. The fall followed the surge in deaths in 2023, driven by Hamas’s 7 October

<sup>23</sup> Hambling, D., ‘About Ukraine’s army of robot dogs’, *Forbes*, 16 Aug. 2024; Sanjinez, V. et al., ‘Trench warfare: Ukraine and Russia dig in as fighting grinds into third year’, *South China Morning Post*, 22 Feb. 2024; and Mao, F., ‘Putin proposes new rules for using nuclear weapons’, BBC, 26 Sep. 2024. On the proliferation and use of armed UAVs see chapter 7, sections II and III, in this volume. On the threatened use of nuclear weapons see chapter 6, section III, and chapter 8, section II, in this volume.

<sup>24</sup> Horowitz, M. C., ‘Battles of precise mass’, *Foreign Affairs*, Nov./Dec. 2024.



attack in Israel.<sup>25</sup> The number of terrorist attacks fell by 3 per cent in 2024, to a total of 3492, driven by an 85 per cent decrease in terrorist activity in Myanmar. Without the reduction in Myanmar, attacks would have increased by 8 per cent.

The data also shows a shift in the dynamics of terrorism. First, the epicentre of terrorism has shifted from the Middle East to the Sahel region, which accounted for 51 per cent of all terrorism deaths in 2024.<sup>26</sup> Second, the impact of terrorism has become increasingly concentrated, with 10 countries accounting for 87 per cent of total terrorism-related deaths in 2023.<sup>27</sup> However, armed conflict remains the primary driver of terrorism, with over 90 per cent of attacks and 98 per cent of terrorism deaths in 2023 taking place in countries in conflict.<sup>28</sup>

### *Child soldiers*

Forced recruitment of child soldiers is widely perpetrated in armed conflict by armed state and non-state actors, including as a specific tactic. In 2023 (the most recent year for which data is available), 8655 children were recruited and used as soldiers (compared to 7622 in 2022), with Myanmar the country with the highest number of cases (1171 in 2023).<sup>29</sup> Research suggests that the risk of children being recruited for use in armed conflict has increased steadily over the past 30 years.<sup>30</sup>

### *Sexual violence*

The use of sexual violence is also widespread in armed conflict. An annual UN report on conflict-related sexual violence listed 18 countries of concern and 58 parties to conflict that were credibly suspected of having committed or instigated sexual violence as a tool of warfare in 2023.<sup>31</sup> Such violence continued over the course of 2024 in many of these countries of concern. In Sudan's civil war, for example, sexual violence was widely reported in Khartoum as well as other cities and regions.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), *Global Terrorism Index 2025: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism* (IEP: Sydney, Mar. 2025), p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Institute for Economics and Peace (note 25).

<sup>27</sup> The 10 countries (in order of rank) were Burkina Faso, Israel, Mali, Pakistan, Syria, Nigeria, Niger, Somalia, Myanmar and Cameroon. Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), *Global Terrorism Index 2024: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism* (IEP: Sydney, Feb. 2024), figure 1.2.

<sup>28</sup> Institute for Economics and Peace (note 27), pp. 2, 10, 33.

<sup>29</sup> United Nations, General Assembly and Security Council, 'Children and armed conflict', Report of the Secretary-General, A/78/842-S/2024/384, 3 June 2024, paras 6, 149.

<sup>30</sup> Østby, G. et al., 'Children at risk of being recruited for armed conflict, 1990–2020', *Children & Society*, vol. 37, no. 2 (Mar. 2023).

<sup>31</sup> United Nations, Security Council, 'Conflict-related sexual violence', Report of the Secretary-General, S/2024/292, 4 Apr. 2024. The total of 18 counts Israel and Palestine together.

<sup>32</sup> Human Rights Watch (HRW), 'Khartoum is not Safe for Women!': *Sexual Violence against Women and Girls in Sudan's Capital* (HRW: New York: July 2024); and United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission for the Sudan, A/HRC/57/23, 7 Nov. 2024.

## Resources

To sustain armed violence requires resources in the form of arms and money for military expenditure. The means to obtain these typically include taxation, the illicit economy (e.g. trafficking and drugs) and external sponsorship (e.g. foreign state funding or international arms transfers).<sup>33</sup> The contours of the Russia–Ukraine war, for example, have been shaped by the military-industrial bases of not only the conflict parties but also their allies and supporters. The domestic arms industries of Ukraine’s Western allies have struggled to keep up with the demand, especially for ammunition, while Russia’s military-industrial base has adapted to sanctions and boosted output due to a combination of large increases in military expenditure and continuing external supplies of critical dual-use technologies.<sup>34</sup> Ukraine is particularly reliant on arms transfers from its allies, but Russia has also received significant arms transfers from Iran and North Korea. International arms transfers also shaped many of the other major armed conflicts in 2024, with transfers of weapons and ammunition to Israel, Myanmar and Sudan, in particular, raising widespread concerns.<sup>35</sup>

An emerging trend is the growing importance of critical minerals both as a key component of military hardware and as a source of potential armed conflict.<sup>36</sup> This is because the production and processing of critical minerals is highly concentrated and global supply chains are fragile, while demand is expected to increase significantly, driven by the green energy transition and technological development. In turn, this is exacerbating existing tensions between geopolitical rivals and fuelling armed conflicts in regions where mining is concentrated. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), for example, income derived from the trading of ‘conflict minerals’—tin, tantalum, tungsten and gold—has been used to finance armed conflict inside the country and in its neighbours for well over a decade.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> On developments in military expenditure, arms production and international arms transfers in 2024 see chapters 3, 4 and 5, respectively, in this volume.

<sup>34</sup> E.g. Béraud-Sudreau, L. et al., ‘The arms industry facing rising demand’, *SIPRI Yearbook 2024*. See also chapter 3, section III, and chapter 4, section II, in this volume.

<sup>35</sup> E.g. United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), ‘States and companies must end arms transfers to Israel immediately or risk responsibility for human rights violations: UN experts’, Press release, 20 June 2024; Amnesty International (AI), *New Weapons Fuelling the Sudan Conflict* (AI: London, July 2024); and Gillard, L. W., ‘The international arms network behind Myanmar’s deadly conflict’, Action on Armed Violence, 28 June 2024. On arms transfers see also chapter 5, sections II–IV, in this volume.

<sup>36</sup> On geopolitical tensions over critical minerals see Zhou, J. and Månberger, A., *Critical Minerals and Great Power Competition: An Overview* (SIPRI: Stockholm, Oct. 2024); and Money, D., ‘China has already cornered a key part of the critical minerals market’, *World Politics Review*, 30 Oct. 2024.

<sup>37</sup> De Koning, R., *Conflict Minerals in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Aligning Trade and Security Interventions*, SIPRI Policy Paper no. 27 (SIPRI: Stockholm, June 2011); and US Department of State, ‘Statement of concern related to certain minerals supply chains from Rwanda and eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo contributing to the ongoing conflict’, 8 July 2024.

## Impacts

Change in the other four dimensions of armed conflict—actors, domains, methods and resources—can influence change in the consequences for people and societies. Armed conflicts result in loss of life and life-changing injuries (including trauma and mental health-related impacts), displacement of civilian populations, and destruction of infrastructure and institutions. They also have long-term economic, developmental, political, environmental, health and social consequences. Some studies focusing on absolute levels of change over long time periods have found a trend from higher to lower levels of violence.<sup>38</sup> However, this can mask significant variations within short- and medium-term trends, as noted above in relation to conflict-related fatalities. Estimated battle deaths in 2024, for example, were 46 per cent higher than in 2023, even though the number of armed clashes only rose by 19 per cent (see table 2.2). In the ‘Violence against civilians’ category both events and fatalities declined marginally in 2024. In addition to the fatalities data generally showing a large upwards trend in recent years, other impacts of armed conflict (sometimes in combination with other factors) also appear to have increased, including violations of international humanitarian law, population displacement, food insecurity and other humanitarian costs.

### *Violations of international humanitarian law*

Many of the armed conflicts, especially the major and high-intensity conflicts, have given rise to numerous accusations of war crimes and other international humanitarian law violations, including the forced recruitment of child soldiers and the use of sexual violence; the use of starvation to achieve military ends; the denial of humanitarian aid; forced displacement; and attacks on aid and health workers, hospitals and schools. Attacks on health workers in conflict zones, for example, were at the highest level ever in 2023, with more than 2500 attacks in war zones such as Gaza, Myanmar, Sudan and Ukraine—a 25 per cent increase compared to 2022.<sup>39</sup>

The rules meant to protect civilians in war are being broken regularly and systematically, with one consequence being that such violations appear to be on the increase.<sup>40</sup> In addition, successfully completed trials for war crimes and crimes against humanity are relatively rare. The International Criminal Court (ICC), for example, has indicted more than 50 individuals since it was established in 2002, mostly from African countries, with 10 being convicted

<sup>38</sup> E.g. Pinker, S., *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence has Declined* (Viking: New York, 2011).

<sup>39</sup> Safeguarding Health in Conflict, *Critical Condition: Violence against Health Care in Conflict 2023* (Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition: Baltimore, MD, May 2024).

<sup>40</sup> E.g. Hathaway, O. A., ‘War unbound’, *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2024; and Davis, I., ‘Explosive weapons and the protection of civilians during the Russia–Ukraine and Israel–Hamas wars’, *SIPRI Yearbook 2024*.

of crimes and 4 acquitted.<sup>41</sup> The most recent ICC conviction was in June 2024 of an al-Qaeda-linked leader of alleged atrocities in northern Mali more than a decade previously, in 2012.<sup>42</sup> Although international justice is often slow and incomplete, progress can sometimes be sudden. In 2024, for example, for the first time since 2004, the ICC and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) both issued rulings and an advisory opinion in relation to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (see section VII).

### *Forced displacement*

Armed conflict is a major driver of forced displacement, which reached record levels in mid 2024, rising to 123 million people: 72 million internally displaced people (IDPs), 32 million refugees, 8 million asylum seekers, 6 million Palestinian refugees and 6 million other people in need of international protection, resulting from ‘persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order’.<sup>43</sup> This was the 12th consecutive annual increase and represented 1 in 67 people worldwide, almost double the proportion of 1 in 114 people a decade ago.

Overall, 70 per cent of forcibly displaced people originated from just 10 countries at the end of June 2024: Syria (with 14 million people forcibly displaced inside and outside its borders), Sudan (13 million), Ukraine (11 million), Afghanistan (9.8 million), the DRC (8.7 million), Venezuela (7.8 million), Colombia (7.5 million), Somalia (4.9 million), Myanmar (4.8 million) and Yemen (4.6 million).<sup>44</sup> In Gaza 90 per cent of the population (1.9 million people) was internally displaced in November 2024.<sup>45</sup>

### *Food insecurity*

Armed conflict also continued to be one of the main drivers of food insecurity in 2024.<sup>46</sup> The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) estimated that 187 million people in 41 countries or territories faced acute food insecurity in 2024.<sup>47</sup> Twenty-six (63 per cent) of those countries were conflict-affected (according to the IPC definition).

<sup>41</sup> Klobucista, C. and Ferragamo, M., ‘The role of the ICC’, Council on Foreign Relations, 22 Nov. 2024. For a summary and other details of the Rome Statute, which established the ICC see annex A, section I, in this volume.

<sup>42</sup> International Criminal Court (ICC), ‘Mr Al Hassan sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment’, Press release, 20 Nov. 2024.

<sup>43</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Mid-year Trends 2024* (UNHCR: Copenhagen, 9 Oct. 2024).

<sup>44</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (note 43), pp. 5–6; and UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), ‘Populations protected and/or assisted by UNHCR by country/territory of origin’, mid-2024.

<sup>45</sup> UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), ‘UNRWA Situation Report #148 on the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem’, 20 Nov. 2024.

<sup>46</sup> On food insecurity and conflict see Delgado, C., ‘Food systems and geopolitics’, *SIPRI Yearbook 2024*.

<sup>47</sup> Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), IPC-CH dashboard.

In Sudan, for example, famine (IPC Phase 5) was reported in North Darfur in December 2024—only the third famine declared globally in the 20 years since the IPC first launched its monitoring system—and many other areas throughout the country were at imminent risk of famine.<sup>48</sup> In Gaza the risk of famine persisted throughout the territory, with hostilities hindering the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Aid supplies from the biggest UN agency operating in Gaza, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), faced delays and blockages by Israel, and laws passed in the Israeli parliament in October to ban the agency were due to take effect in January 2025.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, 2 million people in Myanmar's Rakhine state were at risk of famine due to the civil war and trade blockades.<sup>50</sup>

### *Children and armed conflict*

Large numbers of children suffer the consequences of armed conflicts: between 2005 and 2023 more than 347 000 grave violations against children were verified across more than 30 conflict zones around the world, according to the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).<sup>51</sup> The actual number is undoubtedly far higher. In addition to fatalities through direct injury, children suffer the indirect effects of conflict, including malnutrition, disease and human rights violations. The UN secretary-general's annual report on children and armed conflict documents 32 990 incidents of 'grave violations' against children in conflicts around the world in 2023 (a 21 per cent increase compared to 2022), including the recruitment and use of children by armed groups, killing, maiming, harassment, rape and sexual violence, abductions, and attacks on schools and hospitals.<sup>52</sup> The highest numbers of grave violations were verified in Israel and Palestine (8009), the DRC (3764), Myanmar (2799), Somalia (2283), Nigeria (1995) and Sudan (1721).

Gaza was separately reported to be the deadliest place to be a child in 2023–24, with at least 11 300 children identified as being killed there (30 per cent younger than five and 710 of them less than a year old) in the first

<sup>48</sup> Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), *Famine Review Committee: Sudan, December 2024—Conclusions and Recommendations* (IPC: Rome, 24 Dec. 2024); and 'Famine declared in five areas of Sudan as govt withdraws from IPC', Radio Dabanga, 25 Dec. 2024.

<sup>49</sup> Food Security Information Network, 'Global Report on Food Crises 2024: Mid-year update', Sep. 2024; Frankel, J., Jeffery, J. and Magdy, S., 'Why is only limited aid getting to Palestinians inside Gaza?', AP, 13 Nov. 2024; and Nicas, J., 'Israeli threat to banish aid agency looms over Gaza', *New York Times*, 2 Jan. 2025.

<sup>50</sup> Ratcliffe, R., '2 million at risk of starvation in Myanmar state amid "total economic collapse"', *The Guardian*, 7 Nov. 2024.

<sup>51</sup> UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), 'Children under attack', [n.d.]. See also Ferrara, P. et al., 'War inflicts severe violations on the fundamental human rights of children', *Global Pediatrics*, vol. 7 (Mar. 2024).

<sup>52</sup> United Nations, A/78/842-S/2024/384 (note 29), paras 4–5.

12 months of the Israel– Hamas war.<sup>53</sup> One million children in Gaza had also been displaced from their homes.<sup>54</sup> The civil war in Sudan has the largest child-displacement crisis globally, with more than 4.6 million children displaced by the fighting.<sup>55</sup> Across West and Central Africa, armed conflicts had forced the closure of 14 360 schools in 24 countries by mid 2024, an increase of 1160 closures compared to the previous year, and affecting an estimated 2.8 million children.<sup>56</sup>

### *Economic costs*

Armed conflict also imposes substantial economic costs on society. Even though calculating the economic costs of violence is extremely difficult, one study estimates the economic impact of armed conflict on the global economy in 2023 as US\$908 billion.<sup>57</sup> When two other domains of violence are added ('violence containment', which includes military spending, and 'interpersonal and self-inflicted violence'), the estimated global cost of violence in 2023 rises to \$19.1 trillion, or 13.5 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP). This was a slight increase on the 2022 total, mainly due to an increase in GDP losses from conflict and higher levels of military expenditure. According to this data, the economic impact of violence has increased year on year for 10 of the past 15 years, and in 2023 was 7.4 per cent higher (in real terms) than in 2008. The single largest component of the model in 2023 was global military expenditure (45 per cent of the total), followed by internal security spending (28 per cent) and private security expenditure (6.9 per cent).

### *Environmental and climate costs*

Finally, armed conflict contributes to the deteriorating condition of the global environment, with consequences for sustainable development, human security and ecosystems. All of these vulnerabilities are being amplified by increasingly unpredictable climate patterns.<sup>58</sup>

In sub-Saharan Africa greater food and water insecurity, loss of livelihoods, additional pressure on natural resources, growing water scarcity and more

<sup>53</sup> Save the Children, 'Gaza: At least 3,100 children aged under five killed with others at risk as famine looms', 10 Oct. 2024; and UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), 'Statement by UNICEF regional director for the Middle East and North Africa Adele Khodr on the continued killing and injuring of children in the Gaza Strip and the humanitarian situation', 9 Dec. 2023.

<sup>54</sup> Human Rights Watch (HRW), *'They Destroyed What Was Inside Us': Children with Disabilities Amid Israel's Attacks on Gaza* (HRW: New York, Sep. 2024).

<sup>55</sup> Save the Children, 'What is happening in Sudan?', [n.d.].

<sup>56</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council, 'West and Central Africa: Alarming rise in school closures', 9 Sep. 2024; and West and Central Africa Education in Emergencies Working Group, 'Regional Situation—Q2-2024', 28 Aug. 2024.

<sup>57</sup> Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), *Global Peace Index 2024* (IEP: Sydney, June 2024), pp. 39–48. On global military expenditure in 2024 see chapter 3, section II, in this volume.

<sup>58</sup> On the multidimensional challenges to peace from climate change see Tarif, K. et al., 'Insights on climate, peace and security', Climate, Peace and Security Research Paper, NUPI and SIPRI, Dec. 2023.

climate-linked human displacements contributed to increased violence in 2024. The civil war in Sudan, for example, has exacerbated the severe impacts of climate change on rural livelihoods, while in the Central African Republic (CAR) natural resource mismanagement, illicit mining and the illicit trade in timber have helped to fund the protracted conflict to the detriment of climate action.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, in other conflict settings, such as Myanmar, the intersecting crises of conflict and climate change have created opportunities for elites to exploit vulnerable populations and accelerate extractive activities leading to further environmental degradation.<sup>60</sup> In Ukraine, besides environmental pollution and land degradation, the first two years of the war produced at least 175 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions (the equivalent of about \$32 billion in damages), according to a network of scientists investigating the climate impacts of the war.<sup>61</sup>

### III. Peace processes and peace operations

#### Peace processes in 2024

Like the conflicts they attempt to address, peace processes are also increasingly complex, multidimensional and internationalized, involving a wide range of actors, activities and outcomes.<sup>62</sup> Such efforts typically include ceasefire negotiations, signing of peace agreements, multilateral peace operations, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants (often supported as part of United Nations peace operations), power-sharing arrangements and state-building measures.

There are several peace agreement databases and collections.<sup>63</sup> The PA-X Peace Agreements Database, for example, contains 2144 peace agreements, arising from more than 150 peace processes between 1990 and the end of 2024. Only 6 per cent of that total (121 agreements) are substantive comprehensive agreements. The majority are concerned with either building towards peace—pre-negotiation agreements (26 per cent), substantive partial agreements

<sup>59</sup> Al Sharif, W., 'Climate change and conflict: A perfect storm in Sudan's countryside', Sada, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 4 June 2024; Brodtkorb, I. et al., 'Central African Republic', Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet, NUPI and SIPRI, Oct. 2024; and Schaar, J., *Conflict Heightens Climate Risk; The Case of Sudan*, Insights no. 312 (National University of Singapore, Middle East Institute: Singapore, 19 Nov. 2024).

<sup>60</sup> Kim, K. et al., 'Myanmar', Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet, NUPI and SIPRI, May 2024.

<sup>61</sup> de Klerk, L. et al., Initiative on GHG Accounting of War, *Climate Damage Caused by Russia's War in Ukraine 24 February 2022–23 February 2024* (Ukrainian Ministry of Environmental Protection: Kyiv, 13 June 2024).

<sup>62</sup> Wolff, S., 'The making of peace: Processes and agreements', International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *Armed Conflict Survey 2018* (Routledge: London, 2018), pp. 65–80.

<sup>63</sup> E.g. United Nations, Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Peacemaker Peace Agreements Database; University of Edinburgh, Political Settlements Research Programme, PA-X Peace Agreements Database; and Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), UCDP Peace Agreement Dataset.



**Table 2.3.** Number of peace agreements, 1990–2024

Conflict type	1990–94	1995–99	2000–2004	2005–2009	2010–14	2015–19	2020–24
Interstate	14	32	7	8	4	7	11
Mixed inter-/intrastate	70	46	30	22	44	27	25
Intrastate, national	301	270	234	180	173	135	137
Intrastate, local	12	9	12	40	54	203	37
<b>Total</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>357</b>	<b>283</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>210</b>

Source: University of Edinburgh, Political Settlements Research Programme, PA-X Peace Agreements Database, accessed 25 Apr. 2025.

(26 per cent) and ceasefire agreements (22 per cent)—or the implementation (18 per cent) or renewal (2 per cent) of existing agreements.<sup>64</sup>

The evidence suggests that, despite increasing numbers of armed conflicts, there have been fewer peace agreements in recent years. Most notably, there has been a downward trend in intrastate peace agreements at a national level since 1990–94 (see table 2.3). Instead, the number of local peace processes below national level had been increasing, although the number declined again in 2020–24.<sup>65</sup> A divided—and hence less influential—UN Security Council may be partly responsible for the lower number of total peace agreements in 2020–24.<sup>66</sup>

Not all peace processes lead to positive or sustainable outcomes. Since the mid 1990s most armed conflicts have been renewed outbreaks of old conflicts, indicating that root causes are not being sufficiently addressed.<sup>67</sup> Some of the unsustainable outcomes may be due to women and community and grassroots organizations being under-represented in the political-military hierarchies at the centre of most peace negotiations.<sup>68</sup>

There were a few noteworthy developments in 2024 in peace processes designed to prevent the occurrence (or reoccurrence) of armed violence. China and India, for example, struck a deal in October to help defuse tensions along their disputed border amid a four-year-long military stand-off, and in

<sup>64</sup> On the definitions of peace agreement see Bell, C. et al., ‘PA-X Peace Agreements Database and dataset: Codebook’, version 8, University of Edinburgh, 26 Mar. 2024.

<sup>65</sup> Bell, C., Pospisil, J. and Wise, L. (eds), *Local Peace Processes* (British Academy: London, Sep. 2021).

<sup>66</sup> On the lack of cooperation in the international system and Western tensions with China and Russia see chapter 1, section IV, in this volume, and sections V and VI of this chapter.

<sup>67</sup> von Einsiedel, S. et al., ‘Civil war trends and the changing nature of armed conflict’, Occasional Paper 10, UN University Centre for Policy Research, Mar. 2017. On the peace agreement provisions consistently associated with successful war-to-peace transitions see Fontana, G., Siewert, M. B. and Yakinthou, C., ‘Managing war-to-peace transitions after intra-state conflicts: Configurations of successful peace processes’, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2020).

<sup>68</sup> Caparini, M. and Alvarado Cobar, J. F., ‘Overcoming barriers to grassroots inclusion in peace processes’, WritePeace, SIPRI, 18 Feb. 2021; Schneiker, A., ‘The UN and women’s marginalization in peace negotiations’, *International Affairs*, vol. 97, no. 4 (July 2021); and Wise, L., ‘Gender, peace agreements, and fragmentation’, Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform (PeaceRep), 1 Oct. 2024.



December they agreed to work towards a resolution of the conflict.<sup>69</sup> China and the Philippines also agreed to set up a dispute-resolution process to improve their handling of maritime disputes.<sup>70</sup> Finally, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan resolved a long-standing border dispute in December that had flared into deadly violence in 2021–22.<sup>71</sup>

However, the number of peace processes linked to ongoing armed conflict that advanced in 2024 was limited, even though 43 new agreements were signed during the year.<sup>72</sup> There was some further progress in South Sudan (five new agreements), but little progress and even some setbacks in peace processes in Colombia (despite 23 new peace agreements signed in 2024), Ethiopia, the Philippines (1 new agreement) and Yemen (4 new agreements), as discussed in sections IV–VIII.

### **Multilateral peace operations in 2024**

A total of 61 multilateral peace operations were active in 36 countries or territories around the world in 2024. This was two operations fewer than in 2023. Two new operations started in 2024: the Multinational Security Support Mission in Haiti (MSS) and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM). Six closed in 2024: the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS); the European Union Capacity Building Mission in Niger (EUCAP Sahel Niger); the European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali); the Russian–Turkish Joint Monitoring Centre (RTJMC); the Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM); and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS). Of the 61 operations active in 2024, 21 were in sub-Saharan Africa, 19 in Europe, 14 in the Middle East and North Africa, 4 in the Americas and 3 in Asia and Oceania.<sup>73</sup>

The United Nations conducted 18 operations, more than any other single organization. It was followed closely by the European Union (EU), which conducted 17, the Organization for Security Co-operation Europe (OSCE) with 7 and the African Union (AU) with 5. Another 8 operations were conducted by other regional organizations and alliances. In total, 37 peace oper-

<sup>69</sup> Pandey, V., 'India and China agree to de-escalate border tensions', BBC, 21 Oct. 2024; and Moritsugu, K., 'China and India agree to work on solution to their border dispute in the Himalayas', AP, 19 Dec. 2024.

<sup>70</sup> Flores, M. et al., 'China, Philippines agree on "provisional arrangement" for South China Sea resupply missions, Manila says', Reuters, 21 July 2024.

<sup>71</sup> Putz, C., 'After 33 years, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan announce border agreement', The Diplomat, 4 Dec. 2024.

<sup>72</sup> 23 in Colombia, 5 in South Sudan, 4 in Yemen, 3 in the DRC, 2 in Sudan and 1 each in Haiti, Mali, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines, and 1 each between DRC–Rwanda and Israel–Lebanon. PA-X Agreements Database (note 63), accessed 25 Apr. 2025.

<sup>73</sup> Pfeifer Cruz, C., 'Developments and Trends in Multilateral Peace Operations, 2024', SIPRI Fact Sheet, May 2025.

ations were deployed by regional organizations. The remaining 6 operations were conducted by ad hoc coalitions of states.

As of December 2024, 94 451 international military, civilian and police personnel were deployed with multilateral peace operations globally. This was 6.08 per cent less than a year earlier but 42 per cent less than in 2015. Sub-Saharan Africa hosted nearly three quarters (74 per cent) of all deployed personnel, with 69 913–6459 (8.46 per cent) fewer than at the end of 2023. Another 15.3 per cent (14 498) were deployed in the Middle East and North Africa; 9.42 per cent (8898) in Europe; 0.88 per cent (828) in the Americas; and 0.33 per cent (314) in Asia and Oceania. Personnel deployments in the Americas more than doubled (+119.6 per cent) compared to 2023 but remained relatively stable or fell in other regions.

In 2024 multilateral peace operations continued to be impacted by geopolitical rivalries. Growing geopolitical tensions between Western powers and Russia and China have increasingly influenced discussions and decision-making around peace operations. Achieving consensus in the Security Council has become harder and discussions have grown more contentious. It has become increasingly difficult for member states to agree on the deployment, mandates and financing of peace operations. Geopolitical rivalries are closely linked to growing funding challenges facing peace operations. Traditional donors such as the European Union and the United States are shifting their focus away from Africa, where most peace operations are deployed, towards national security and territorial defence in their own regions. This shift is reflected in shrinking peace operation budgets.

Another trend in peace operations over the past decade is a shift away from new operations being conducted by the UN towards operations being conducted by regional organizations or ad hoc coalitions. Since 2014, the number of active UN peacekeeping operations has declined and the UN has launched only special political missions, which are smaller in both size and scope. Despite their increasing role in conflict management, regionally led peace operations have struggled with operational and financial challenges, including shortages of funding, equipment and personnel.

Over the past few years, relations between peace operations and several host governments have deteriorated, leading to the closure of operations in Mali, Sudan and Niger. In 2024, however, this trend started to give way to a more complex dynamic. While government–mission relations have not significantly improved, host governments increasingly started to recognize the challenges of managing conflicts without the support of ongoing peace operations, especially in the face of persistent threats from armed groups. Some were also reconsidering the effectiveness of the alternatives they initially pursued.

Experience from earlier cases highlights the risks of premature withdrawals. In Sudan, the withdrawal of UNAMID (AU–UN Hybrid Operation

**Table 2.4.** Multilateral peace operations, 2024

Unless otherwise stated, all figures are as of 31 Dec. 2024. Operations that closed in 2024 are shown in *italic* and their figures are based on the month of their termination. The figures of closed operations are not included in the aggregate figures.

Operation	Start	Location	Mil.	Pol.	Civ.
<b>UN peacekeeping operations</b>			<b>53 854</b>	<b>6 033</b>	<b>2 793</b>
UNTSO	1948	Middle East	151	–	70
UNMOGIP	1951	India/Pakistan	41	–	25
UNFICYP	1964	Cyprus	806	64	99
UNDOF	1974	Syria (Golan)	1 173	–	45
UNIFIL	1978	Lebanon	9 730	–	239
MINURSO	1991	Western Sahara	220	2	74
MONUSCO	1999	DRC	10 602	1 324	525
UNMIK	1999	Kosovo	9	10	54
UNISFA	2011	Abyei	3 231	52	165
UNMISS	2011	South Sudan	13 903	1 552	840
MINUSCA	2014	CAR	13 988	3 029	657
<b>UN special political missions</b>			<b>1 198</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1 028</b>
UNAMA	2002	Afghanistan	1	–	237
UNAMI	2003	Iraq	245	–	204
UNSMIL	2011	Libya	232	–	203
<i>UNSOM</i>	<i>2013</i>	<i>Somalia</i>	<i>633</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>142</i>
UNVMC	2017	Colombia	77	73	120
BINUH	2019	Haiti	–	19	84
UNMHA	2019	Yemen	11	–	39
UNTMIS	2024	Somalia	632	8	141
<b>AU</b>			<b>11 594</b>	<b>1 040</b>	<b>87</b>
MISAHHEL	2013	Mali	–	–	..
MISAC	2014	CAR	–	–	..
AU Mission in Libya	2020	Libya	–	–	..
<i>ATMIS</i>	<i>2022</i>	<i>Somalia</i>	<i>11 586</i>	<i>1 040</i>	<i>85</i>
AU-MVCM	2022	Ethiopia	8	–	2
<b>ECOWAS</b>			<b>1 506</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>–</b>
ECOMIG	2017	Gambia	875	125	–
SSMGB	2022	Guinea-Bissau	631	–	–
<b>EU<sup>a</sup></b>			<b>1 542</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>1 145</b>
EUFOR ALTHEA	2004	Bosnia and Herzegovina	1 204	–	–
EUBAM Rafah	2005	Palestinian Territories	–	–	10
EUPOL COPPS	2005	Palestinian Territories	–	–	61
EULEX Kosovo	2008	Kosovo	–	–	229
EUMM Georgia	2008	Georgia	–	–	218
EUTM Somalia	2010	Somalia	164	–	12
<i>EUCAP Sahel Niger</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>Niger</i>	–	–	6
<i>EUTM Mali</i>	<i>2013</i>	<i>Mali</i>	<i>128</i>	–	20
EUBAM Libya <sup>b</sup>	2013	Libya	–	–	54
EUAM Ukraine	2014	Ukraine	–	–	161
EUCAP Sahel Mali	2015	Mali	–	–	95
EUTM RCA	2016	CAR	93	–	4
EUAM Iraq	2017	Iraq	–	–	70

Operation	Start	Location	Mil.	Pol.	Civ.
EUAM RCA	2020	CAR	–	–	47
EUMAM Mozambique <sup>c</sup>	2021	Mozambique	81	–	4
EUMA	2023	Armenia	–	–	146
EUPM Moldova	2023	Moldova	–	–	34
<b>IGAD</b>			–	–	<b>62</b>
CTSAMVM	2015	South Sudan	–	–	62
<b>NATO</b>			<b>4 802</b>	–	<b>..</b>
KFOR	1999	Kosovo	4 302	–	..
NMI	2018	Iraq	500	–	..
<b>OAS</b>			–	–	<b>23</b>
MAPP/OEA	2004	Colombia	–	–	23
<b>OSCE</b>			–	–	<b>174</b>
OSCE Mission to Skopje	1992	North Macedonia	–	–	28
OSCE Mission to Moldova	1993	Moldova	–	–	13
OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina	1995	Bosnia and Herzegovina	–	–	24
OSCE PRCIO	1995	Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh)	–	–	2
OSCE Presence in Albania	1997	Albania	–	–	15
OMIK	1999	Kosovo	–	–	76
OSCE Mission to Serbia	2001	Serbia	–	–	16
<b>SADC</b>			<b>4 350</b>	–	–
<i>SAMIM</i>	2021	<i>Mozambique</i>	1 495	..	..
SAMIDRC	2023	DRC	4 350	–	–
<b>Ad hoc coalitions of states</b>			<b>2 574</b>	<b>404</b>	<b>17</b>
NNSC	1953	South Korea	10	–	–
MFO	1982	Egypt (Sinai)	1 165	–	..
JCC/JPKF	1992	Moldova (Trans-Dniester)	1 371	–	–
OHR	1995	Bosnia and Herzegovina	–	–	17
<i>RTJMC</i>	2021	<i>Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh)</i>	120	–	–
MSS	2024	Haiti	28	404	–

– = not applicable; .. = information not available; Mil. = military personnel (troops and military observers); Pol. = police; Civ. = international civilian personnel; CAR = Central African Republic; DRC = Democratic Republic of the Congo. *United Nations (UN)*: BINUH = UN Integrated Office in Haiti; MINURSO = UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara; MINUSCA = UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the CAR; MONUSCO = UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC; UN = United Nations; UNAMA = UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan; UNAMI = UN Assistance Mission in Iraq; UNDOF = UN Disengagement Observer Force; UNFICYP = UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus; UNIFIL = UN Interim Force in Lebanon; UNISFA = UN Interim Security Force for Abyei; UNMHA = UN Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement; UNMIK = UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo; UNMIL = UN Support Mission in Libya; UNMISS = UN Mission in South Sudan; UNMOGIP = UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan; UNSOM = UN Assistance Mission in Somalia; UNTMIS = UN Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia; UNSOM = UN Assistance Mission in Somalia; UNTSO = UN Truce Supervision Organization; UNVMC = UN Verification

Mission in Colombia. *African Union (AU)*: ATMIS = AU Transition Mission in Somalia; AU-MVCM = AU Monitoring, Verification and Compliance Mission; MISAC = AU Mission for the CAR and Central Africa; MISAHEL = AU Mission for Mali and the Sahel. *Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)*: ECOMIG = ECOWAS Mission in the Gambia; SSMGB = Stabilisation Support Mission in Guinea-Bissau. *European Union (EU)*: EUAM Iraq = EU Advisory Mission in Iraq; EUAM RCA = EU Advisory Mission in the CAR; EUAM Ukraine = EU Advisory Mission Ukraine; EUBAM Libya = EU Integrated Border Management Assistance Mission in Libya; EUBAM Rafah = EU Border Assistance Mission for the Rafah Crossing Point; EUCAP Sahel Mali = EU Capacity Building Mission in Mali; EUCAP Sahel Niger = EU Capacity Building Mission in Niger; EUFOR ALTHEA = EU Force Bosnia and Herzegovina Operation ALTHEA; EULEX Kosovo = EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo; EUMA = EU Mission in Armenia; EUMAM Mozambique = EU Military Assistance Mission Mozambique; EUMM Georgia = EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia; EUPM Moldova = EU Partnership Mission in Moldova; EUPOL COPPS = EU Police Mission for the Palestinian Territories; EUTM Mali = EU Training Mission in Mali; EUTM RCA = EU Training Mission in the CAR; EUTM Somalia = EU Training Mission in Somalia. *Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)*: CTSAMVM = Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism. *North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)*: KFOR = Kosovo Force; NMI = NATO Mission Iraq; OAS = Organization of American States; MAPP/OEA = Organization of American States Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia. *Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)*: OMIK = OSCE Mission in Kosovo; PRCIO = Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office on the Conflict Dealt with by the OSCE Minsk Conference. *Southern African Development Community (SADC)*: SAMIDRC = SADC Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo; SAMIM = SADC Mission in Mozambique. *Ad hoc coalitions*: JCC/JPKF = Joint Control Commission/Joint Peacekeeping Forces; MFO = Multinational Force and Observers; MSS = Multinational Security Support Mission in Haiti; NNSC = Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission; OHR = Office of the High Representative; RTJMC = Russian-Turkish Joint Monitoring Centre

<sup>a</sup> Figures on international civilian staff may include uniformed police.

<sup>b</sup> EUBAM Libya was established in 2013 but did not qualify as a multilateral peace operation prior to 1 Jan. 2019.

<sup>c</sup> The EU Training Mission in Mozambique (EUTM Mozambique) was renamed EUMAM Mozambique on 1 Sep. 2024.

Source: SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database, accessed 24 Apr. 2025.

in Darfur) in 2020 created a security vacuum in which the situation on the ground deteriorated.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, in Mali and Mozambique, the withdrawals of MINUSMA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali) and SAMIM have coincided with rising threats from insurgent groups.<sup>75</sup> These cases offer important lessons for the ongoing transitions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia.

The landscape of conflict management is changing quickly. While the full, longer-term implications of such changes remain unclear, in the short term they are likely to lead to greater inaction, deinstitutionalization and militarization in multilateral peace operations.

<sup>74</sup> Kleinfeld, P. and Amin, M., 'UN peacekeeping pullout leaves security vacuum in Darfur', *New Humanitarian*, 25 May 2021.

<sup>75</sup> Africa Defense Forum, '“We cannot describe the horror”: Violence in Mali surges as MINUSMA withdraws', 17 Oct. 2023; and Gould, T., 'What does the end of SAMIM mean for Cabo Delgado?', *Zitamar News*, 29 Jan. 2024.

**Table 2.5.** Estimated conflict-related fatalities in the Americas, 2018–24

Fatality figures are collated from 4 event types: battles; explosions and remote violence; protests, riots and strategic developments; and violence against civilians.<sup>a</sup> A country is treated as being in an armed conflict in a given year if there were 25 or more battle-related deaths in that year.

Country	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Brazil	7 330	5 745	5 678	6 344	7 732	8 351	7 294
Colombia	1 503	1 428	1 771	2 113	2 302	1 991	1 742
El Salvador	961	893	385	433	279	57	22 <sup>b</sup>
Guatemala	800	1 115	573	672	743	853	280
Haiti	269	470	682	759	1 549	2 308	2 528
Honduras	793	1 018	728	708	694	650	504
Jamaica	224	280	264	300	383	416	332
Mexico	9 590	9 243	8 374	8 260	7 821	7 244	8 264
Puerto Rico (USA)	123	150	117 <sup>b</sup>	177	212	197	197
Trinidad and Tobago	243	181	162	186	281	334	326
Venezuela	3 047	3 262	2 557	1 716	1 075	783	537
<b>Total</b>	<b>24 883</b>	<b>23 785</b>	<b>21 291</b>	<b>21 668</b>	<b>23 071</b>	<b>23 184</b>	<b>22 026</b>
No. of countries in armed conflict	11	11	10	11	11	11	10

<sup>a</sup> Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), ‘Armed Conflict Location & Event Data codebook’, 3 Oct. 2024.

<sup>b</sup> Battle-related deaths totalled less than the threshold of 25 in this year.

Source: ACLED Explorer, accessed 27 Jan. 2025.

## IV. Conflict dynamics in the Americas

The Americas was the only region not to have had a major armed conflict in 2018–24, and in 2023–24 it was the region with the fewest estimated conflict-related fatalities. El Salvador dropped below the threshold for armed conflict in 2024, reducing the number of countries in armed conflict in the region from 11 to 10 (see table 2.5). The estimated number of conflict-related fatalities in the Americas in 2024 (22 300) was 5 per cent below that in 2023 (23 400; see table 2.1).

The two countries that suffered the highest number of fatalities—Brazil and Mexico—largely faced criminal rather than political violence. In the past few years, several governments in the region have increasingly militarized their approach to fighting criminal gangs, prompted partly by the claimed success of the approach in El Salvador.<sup>76</sup> The military in Ecuador, for example, was sent into the streets and prisons to fight criminal gangs—an approach that received public support in a referendum in April 2024.<sup>77</sup> Argentina, Brazil,

<sup>76</sup> Janetsky, M., ‘The president jailed 1% of El Salvador’s population. Their children are paying the consequences’, AP, 10 Feb. 2024.

<sup>77</sup> Noboa Gonzalez, M. F., ‘How Ecuador went from an “island of peace” to one of the world’s most violent countries’, *The Conversation*, 17 Jan. 2024; and Glatzky, G., ‘A country awash in violence backs its leader’s hard-line stance’, *New York Times*, 21 Apr. 2024.

Mexico and Paraguay also deployed their armed forces in the fight against narcotrafficking and organized crime in 2024.<sup>78</sup>

In Venezuela the ongoing political and economic crisis was exacerbated by the disputed presidential election held on 28 July 2024, with a risk that this might lead to further domestic repression and violence. The Guyana–Venezuela territorial dispute over the Essequibo region remained a source of tension.<sup>79</sup>

### Gang violence in Haiti

There was a surge in gang violence in several Caribbean countries and territories in 2024, including Jamaica, Puerto Rico, and Trinidad and Tobago, but Haiti continued to be the worst affected despite the long-delayed arrival of international security assistance in June.<sup>80</sup> The assistance had been approved by the United Nations Security Council in October 2023 in the form of an ad hoc (i.e. non-UN) multilateral peace operation, the Multinational Security Support Mission in Haiti (MSS).<sup>81</sup> However, Kenya's first contingent of 200 police officers only arrived in Port-au-Prince on 25 June 2024, with a further 200 arriving a week later. Twenty military personnel and four more police officers arrived in September from Jamaica, along with two Belizean military officers, while another six military personnel from the Bahamas arrived in October.<sup>82</sup> These deployments fell far short of the 2500 initially pledged by various countries. In late September the UN Security Council extended the mandate of the Kenya-led mission but declined to transform it into a UN peacekeeping mission.<sup>83</sup>

Coordinated gang attacks continued in Port-au-Prince and beyond the capital. On 3 October, in one of Haiti's worst mass killings in decades, the Gran Griff gang killed at least 115 people in the town of Pont-Sondé, Artibonite.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Delgado, J., 'Brazil and Paraguay join forces against organized crime', *Diálogo Américas*, 23 Apr. 2024; 'Sinaloa shootout: Mexico troops kill 19 suspected cartel members', *Al Jazeera*, 23 Oct. 2024; and Iglesia, F., 'Armed forces deployed to Rosario to quell upsurge in violence', *Buenos Aires Herald*, 19 Mar. 2024.

<sup>79</sup> Gunson, P., 'Venezuela: What next after its election uproar?', International Crisis Group (ICG), 2 Aug. 2024. On the Guyana–Venezuela dispute and military build-up on the border see chapter 3, section III, in this volume.

<sup>80</sup> United Nations, Security Council, 'Deadly violence in Haiti at record high, some worst scenarios now realities, special representative tells Security Council, urging deployment of Support Mission', Meetings coverage, SC/15674, 22 Apr. 2024; and Pellegrini, S., 'Gang violence in the Caribbean reaches farther than Haiti', ACLED, 23 Oct. 2024.

<sup>81</sup> Cruz, C. P., Smit, T. and Tovar, M., 'Global trends and developments in peace operations', *SIPRI Yearbook 2024*, pp. 84–85.

<sup>82</sup> Blaise, J., 'Jamaican and Belizean forces arrive in Haiti to reinforce Kenya-led MSS', *Haitian Times*, 13 Sep. 2024; and 'A team of Bahamian soldiers has arrived in Haiti', *Haiti Libre*, 19 Oct. 2024.

<sup>83</sup> Lederer, E. M., 'UN extends Kenya-led force to tackle gangs in Haiti, but sidelines call for UN peacekeepers', AP, 30 Sep. 2024.

<sup>84</sup> Côté-Paluck, E. and Phillips, T., 'Haiti residents fear "fate is in God's hands" after gang commits worst mass killing in decades', *The Guardian*, 16 Oct. 2024.

**Table 2.6.** Estimated conflict-related fatalities in Asia and Oceania, 2018–24

Fatality figures are collated from 4 event types: battles; explosions and remote violence; protests, riots and strategic developments; and violence against civilians.<sup>a</sup> A country is treated as being in an armed conflict in a given year if there were 25 or more battle-related deaths in that year.

Country	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Afghanistan	43 264	41 608	31 359	42 654	4 044	1 125	1 322
Bangladesh	268	391	279 <sup>b</sup>	357 <sup>b</sup>	309	336	925
India	2 121	1 510	1 339	1 019	904	1 207	1 207
Indonesia	172	200	134	138	265	214	156
Kyrgyzstan	4 <sup>b</sup>	8 <sup>b</sup>	2 <sup>b</sup>	32 <sup>c</sup>	68 <sup>c</sup>	2 <sup>b</sup>	1 <sup>b</sup>
Myanmar	261	1 647	696	11 668	23 391	21 251	19 715
Pakistan	1 225	1 150	935	1 406	1 770	2 325	3 071
Philippines	2 098	1 705	1 500	1 168	912	856	647
Tajikistan	64 <sup>b</sup>	66 <sup>b</sup>	2 <sup>b</sup>	20 <sup>c</sup>	71 <sup>c</sup>	6 <sup>b</sup>	– <sup>b</sup>
Thailand	117	174	104	66	43 <sup>b</sup>	57	49
<b>Total</b>	<b>49 594</b>	<b>48 459</b>	<b>36 350</b>	<b>58 528</b>	<b>31 777</b>	<b>27 379</b>	<b>27 093</b>
No. of countries in armed conflict	8	8	7	9	9	8	8

<sup>a</sup> Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), ‘Armed Conflict Location & Event Data codebook’, 3 Oct. 2024.

<sup>b</sup> Battle-related deaths totalled less than the threshold of 25 in this year.

<sup>c</sup> While battle-related deaths totalled less than the threshold of 25 in Kyrgyzstan and in Tajikistan in this year, the combined total exceeded 25.

Source: ACLED Explorer, accessed 25–27 Jan. 2025.

Another gang massacre took place in Port-au-Prince in December.<sup>85</sup> The armed gang violence drove 5.4 million people—nearly half the population—into high levels of acute food insecurity and by the end of the year more than 1 million people were internally displaced.<sup>86</sup> The near famine conditions have also enabled the gangs to recruit more children.<sup>87</sup>

## The peace process in Colombia

Colombia’s decades-long conflict was largely ended by the 2016 peace agreement between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People’s Army (Fuerza Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia–Ejército del Pueblo, FARC-EP). However, some splinter factions remained outside the peace process, while several new and existing armed groups moved into the vacuum created by FARC-EP’s demobilization.

<sup>85</sup> AFP, ‘Almost 200 massacred in Haiti as Vodou practitioners reportedly targeted’, *The Guardian*, 9 Dec. 2024.

<sup>86</sup> United Nations, “‘Spiralling crisis’ in Haiti demands continued global attention: WFP”, UN News, 25 Oct. 2024; and International Organization for Migration (IOM), ‘Haiti displacement triples surpassing one million as humanitarian crisis worsens’, 15 Jan. 2025.

<sup>87</sup> Human Rights Watch (HRW), ‘Haiti: Criminal violence, hunger trapping children’, 9 Oct. 2024; and United Nations, A/78/842–S/2024/384 (note 29), paras 70–81.



Since President Gustavo Petro took office in 2022, his government has pursued a policy of ‘total peace’ alongside implementing the peace agreement. This has included peace talks with armed groups—notably the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN), the largest remaining active militant organization, and a FARC splinter faction known as FARC–Central General Staff (FARC–Estado Mayor Central, FARC-EMC)—as well as the addressing of structural violence, racial discrimination, gender inequality, social inequalities and environmental concerns.<sup>88</sup>

In 2024 the armed conflicts between the government and the groups outside the peace process, as well as inter-group fighting, continued. Most of the ceasefire agreements made in 2023 collapsed and some of the groups fractured further to focus on local control of territories and illicit economies.<sup>89</sup> In May and June, the security situation in the south-west sharply deteriorated as splinter groups of FARC-EMC launched attacks on state targets and clashed with one another.<sup>90</sup> In addition, the government ended peace talks with the ELN in September after the group attacked an army base that killed two soldiers and injured around 20 more.<sup>91</sup> By the end of 2024, President Petro’s ‘total peace’ initiative looked increasingly fragile.

## V. Conflict dynamics in Asia and Oceania

The estimated number of conflict-related fatalities in Asia and Oceania in 2024 (27 500) was marginally below the figure for 2023 (27 800; see table 2.1). Nearly three-quarters of this regional total was accounted for by deaths in the civil war in Myanmar (see table 2.6). There were also significant increases in fatalities in Afghanistan of (18 per cent) and Pakistan (32 per cent).

In the three years after their rapid takeover of Afghanistan in 2021, the Taliban consolidated control over the country’s territory and key levers of power. Although Islamic State–Khorasan Province (ISK) has carried out occasional attacks in Afghanistan, it is not a serious threat to the Taliban, and neighbouring countries as well as the international community have largely decided to work with the regime.<sup>92</sup> Although the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan

<sup>88</sup> On the implementation of the 2016 accords and analysis of progress in the ELN negotiations see Haugaard, L., ‘Advancing from partial peace: How the United States can help consolidate peace in Colombia’, Latin America Working Group, June 2024. On key developments in 2023 see also Gowan, R., ‘Peace processes’, *SIPRI Yearbook 2024*, pp. 66–68.

<sup>89</sup> Collins, J., ‘In Colombia, Petro’s peace plan isn’t just about negotiating anymore’, *World Politics Review*, 1 Apr. 2024; and ‘EMC fractures in major blow to “total peace” plan’, *Latin American Security & Strategic Review*, Sep. 2024.

<sup>90</sup> Rueda, M., ‘Violence intensifies in southwest Colombia as FARC holdout group attacks police and military’, AP, 21 May 2024; and Shuldiner, H. and Garcia, S., ‘High-level attack punctuates security crisis in southwestern Colombia’, *InSight Crime*, 19 June 2024.

<sup>91</sup> Shuldiner, H., ‘ELN attack destroys chances for peace with strengthening Colombian guerrilla group’, *InSight Crime*, 18 Sep. 2024.

<sup>92</sup> Byrd, W., ‘Where is the Taliban regime three years in?’, *Lawfare*, 16 Aug. 2024.

eased somewhat in 2024, the institutionalized exclusion of women and girls from many aspects of public life worsened.<sup>93</sup>

Afghanistan's relations with Pakistan were also strained, in part due to regular attacks by the Pakistani Taliban (Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, TTP) on the Pakistani security forces in border provinces. In March (and again in December), Pakistan launched its first acknowledged air strikes in Afghanistan since the Taliban's takeover in 2021 in response to a deadly militant attack on a Pakistani Army post in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.<sup>94</sup>

Pakistan also faced a surge in attacks by separatist ethnic militants in Balochistan province throughout the year, as well as Iranian air strikes at the beginning of the year to which Pakistan responded in kind.<sup>95</sup> The country's domestic political crisis was deepened by disputed national elections on 8 February, which triggered protests.<sup>96</sup>

Relations between India and Pakistan continued in their current stasis, with no significant outbreaks of violence in Kashmir in 2024. However, in the north-eastern Indian state of Manipur, ethnic violence between the Kuki-Zomi tribe and the majority Hindu Meithei that began in May 2023 continued during the year.<sup>97</sup> Around 250 people had been killed and tens of thousands displaced by the violence.<sup>98</sup> In November in the neighbouring state of Nagaland, an armed separatist group threatened to resume violent armed resistance after nearly three decades of ceasefire, accusing the Indian government of failing to honour promises in earlier agreements.<sup>99</sup> The low-level Maoist Naxalite insurgency continued throughout the year in central India, with the armed group suffering significant losses.<sup>100</sup>

In the Philippines the long-running low-level communist insurgency continued. The New People's Army (NPA) and the Philippine government signed a joint statement in Oslo in November 2023 in which they agreed to work toward a 'principled and peaceful' resolution of the armed conflict. However,

<sup>93</sup> Smith, G., 'Afghanistan three years after the Taliban takeover', International Crisis Group (ICG), 14 Aug. 2024.

<sup>94</sup> Ahmed, M. and Faiez, R., 'Pakistani jets target suspected Pakistani Taliban hideouts in Afghanistan, killing 8 people', AP, 18 Mar. 2024; and Hussain, A., 'Pakistan air strikes in Afghanistan spark Taliban warning of retaliation', Al Jazeera, 25 Dec. 2024.

<sup>95</sup> Hussain, A., 'Pakistan missiles strike Iran in retaliatory bombing as tensions soar', Al Jazeera, 18 Jan. 2024; and 'More than 60 dead in south-west Pakistan after multiple attacks by Balochistan Liberation Army separatist group', ABC News, 26 Aug. 2024.

<sup>96</sup> Ahmed, I. and Ul Haque, M. S., 'Unpacking Pakistan's 2024 general elections and the aftermath', Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, 11 Apr. 2024.

<sup>97</sup> On developments in 2023 see Gowan, R., 'Global trends and regional developments in armed conflicts', *SIPRI Yearbook 2024*, pp. 36–37.

<sup>98</sup> 'Indian state imposes curfew and shuts internet after fresh wave of ethnic clashes', AP, 10 Sep. 2024.

<sup>99</sup> Agarwala, T., 'India's Naga separatists threaten to resume violence after decades-long truce', Reuters, 8 Nov. 2024.

<sup>100</sup> Mishra, R., 'Security forces kill 28 Maoists in encounter in Chhattisgarh's Narayanpur', *Hindustan Times*, 5 Oct. 2024; and '12 Maoists killed in Chhattisgarh encounter, 2024 toll reaches 103', *New Indian Express*, 11 May 2024.

there was subsequently little reported contact between the two sides.<sup>101</sup> The peace process with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the Bangsamoro region of Mindanao remained broadly on track.<sup>102</sup>

Several regional flashpoints in the Asia-Pacific—in particular the Korean Peninsula, the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait—were a cause for growing concern that they might escalate to a major interstate armed conflict.<sup>103</sup> A short-lived declaration of martial law in the Republic of Korea (South Korea) in early December ended peacefully but triggered a constitutional crisis with President Yoon Suk Yeol facing impeachment.<sup>104</sup> In the South China Sea, confrontations around disputed shoals between China and the Philippines continued, despite both sides agreeing to a dispute-resolution process in July.<sup>105</sup> Chinese military activities, on the one hand, and those of the United States and its allies, on the other, were also straining relations and raising the risk of maritime confrontations.<sup>106</sup>

### The civil war in Myanmar

By far the bloodiest conflict in Asia and Oceania in 2024 was the civil war in Myanmar. The military coup in February 2021 gave rise to intensified fighting with long-established armed groups associated with Myanmar's ethnic minority groups and sparked the formation of new pro-democracy militias in support of the opposition National Unity Government (NUG). The Myanmar armed forces, the Tatmadaw, initially prevented major losses of territory around the country. This changed when the Three Brotherhood Alliance (consisting of three of the most powerful ethnic armed groups, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, the Arakan Army and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army) launched a major military offensive (Operation 1027) on 27 October 2023.<sup>107</sup> The alliance quickly captured towns and

<sup>101</sup> Hart, M., 'The Philippines' communist insurgency is set to grind on', *World Politics Review*, 7 Aug. 2024; and International Crisis Group (ICG), *Calming the Long War in the Philippine Countryside*, Asia Report no. 338 (ICG: Brussels, Apr. 2024).

<sup>102</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), 'CrisisWatch 2024—November trends and December alerts: Asia', Nov. 2024.

<sup>103</sup> E.g. Park, J., 'Are North and South Korea escalating toward war?', *Responsible Statecraft*, 23 Oct. 2024; and International Crisis Group (ICG), *The Widening Schism Across the Taiwan Strait*, Asia Report no. 342 (ICG: Brussels, 26 Sep. 2024).

<sup>104</sup> Rashid, R., 'South Korea's president, Yoon Suk Yeol, facing impeachment after martial law shock', *The Guardian*, 4 Dec. 2024.

<sup>105</sup> Shidore, S., 'Dangerous China–Philippine clashes could be expanding', *Responsible Statecraft*, 20 Aug. 2024; and Flores et al. (note 70).

<sup>106</sup> E.g. Davidson, H., 'China sounds warning after Philippines and US announce most expansive military drills yet', *The Guardian*, 18 Apr. 2024; and 'China's defence ministry says Dutch ship incident "heinous"', *Reuters*, 11 June 2024.

<sup>107</sup> 'What is Myanmar's Three Brotherhood Alliance that is resisting the military?', *Al Jazeera*, 16 Jan. 2024; and Noon, L. M., 'Sixty-one years of Ta'ang revolution', *Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform (PeaceRep)*, 12 Jan. 2024. On developments in 2023 see Gowan (note 97), pp. 38–40.

**Table 2.7.** Estimated conflict-related fatalities in Europe, 2018–24

Fatality figures are collated from 4 event types: battles; explosions and remote violence; protests, riots and strategic developments; and violence against civilians.<sup>a</sup> A country is treated as being in an armed conflict in a given year if there were 25 or more battle-related deaths in that year.

Country	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Armenia	6 <sup>c</sup>	2 <sup>b</sup>	27	24 <sup>c</sup>	217	24 <sup>c</sup>	4 <sup>b</sup>
Azerbaijan	47 <sup>c</sup>	14 <sup>b</sup>	7 057	33 <sup>c</sup>	68	570 <sup>c</sup>	2 <sup>b</sup>
Russia <sup>d</sup>	121	46	56	26 <sup>b</sup>	114 <sup>b</sup>	253	4 790
Ukraine <sup>d</sup>	896	412	121	149	34 042 <sup>e</sup>	35 996 <sup>e</sup>	72 850 <sup>e</sup>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1 070</b>	<b>474</b>	<b>7 261</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>34 441</b>	<b>36 843</b>	<b>77 646</b>
No. of countries in armed conflict	4	2	4	1	3	4	2

<sup>a</sup> Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), ‘Armed Conflict Location & Event Data codebook’, 3 Oct. 2024.

<sup>b</sup> Battle-related deaths totalled less than the threshold of 25 in this year.

<sup>c</sup> While battle-related deaths totalled less than the threshold of 25 in Armenia in this year, when combined with Azerbaijan the total exceeded 25.

<sup>d</sup> ACLED records fatalities in the country or territory in which the event took place. Thus, total fatalities in Ukraine include also Russians and North Koreans fighting there.

<sup>e</sup> These figures may be underestimates.

Source: ACLED Explorer, accessed 27 Jan. 2025.

overran military bases and outposts along the Chinese border in the north-east of Shan state. Other militia groups and the People’s Defence Forces (a loose coalition of armed groups broadly loyal to the NUG) joined in around the country. By the end of 2024, resistance forces fully or partially controlled huge swathes of territory, forcing the Tatmadaw back towards the centre of the country around the capital, Naypyidaw, and the largest city, Yangon.<sup>108</sup>

The Tatmadaw increasingly relied on indiscriminate air and artillery strikes.<sup>109</sup> Hundreds of thousands of civilians were displaced by the fighting; by the end of 2024 there were more than 3.5 million IDPs in Myanmar and 19.9 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>110</sup>

Myanmar is fragmenting as ethnic armed groups consolidate control of their homelands. The Arakan Army, for example, has seized most of central and northern Rakhine state, which borders Bangladesh, creating the largest area in Myanmar currently under the control of a non-state armed group—in terms of both size and population. The Tatmadaw and the Arakan Army have both been accused of committing serious abuses against civilians in the territory. Thousands of Rohingya—a predominantly Muslim ethnic group in

<sup>108</sup> Ratcliffe, R. and Lovett, L., ‘Blow for Myanmar’s military as rebels say hundreds have surrendered at key border town’, *The Guardian*, 9 Apr. 2024.

<sup>109</sup> Soe, A. N., ‘Myanmar military kills dozens in heaviest airstrikes since 2021 coup’, *The Guardian*, 8 Oct. 2024.

<sup>110</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Myanmar Humanitarian Update no. 43, 3 Jan. 2025.

Rakhine—crossed into Bangladesh (which already hosted around 1 million Rohingya refugees) to escape the fighting.<sup>111</sup>

Outside diplomatic actors, including the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) and the United Nations, continued to have little impact on the war.<sup>112</sup> In January 2024 China used its close ties with both the Tatmadaw and the Three Brotherhood Alliance to negotiate a ceasefire in northern Shan state.<sup>113</sup> This lasted until June, when the alliance opened a second phase of Operation 1027 having accused the military of violating the ceasefire.<sup>114</sup> China closed border crossings, cut electricity to towns in Myanmar and took other measures in an unsuccessful attempt to end the fighting.<sup>115</sup>

## VI. Conflict dynamics in Europe

The estimated number of conflict-related fatalities in Europe doubled in 2024 (from 36 800 in 2023 to 77 600), despite the number of locations of armed conflict halving (from 4 to 2; see table 2.7). This was, of course, due to the deepening attrition of the Russia–Ukraine war, which included more clashes inside Russia itself in 2024. Progress on a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan remained elusive.<sup>116</sup>

Islamist extremism also appeared to be a rising threat in Russia. An attack by the Islamic State group (most likely ISK) killed over 130 people at a theatre in Moscow on 22 March 2024—the worst terrorist attack in Russia in 20 years—while in June a series of attacks on churches and synagogues in Dagestan, a mainly Muslim region in the North Caucasus, left 20 dead, including 15 police officers.<sup>117</sup>

### The Russia–Ukraine war

ACLED estimates that, by the end of 2024, there had been 148 000 conflict-related fatalities since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Other reports suggest that this might be an underestimate. Although both sides have each avoided publishing robust figures on their own casualties

<sup>111</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), *Breaking Away: The Battle for Myanmar's Rakhine State*, Asia Report no. 339 (ICG: Brussels, 27 Aug. 2024).

<sup>112</sup> Nash, C., 'Biden, Kishida and Marcos just missed a chance to step up on Myanmar', *World Politics Review*, 12 Apr. 2024.

<sup>113</sup> AFP, 'Myanmar junta and armed rebels agree ceasefire', *The Guardian*, 12 Jan. 2024.

<sup>114</sup> Thit, N., 'Operation 1027: Major gains in phase two of Myanmar resistance offensive', *The Irrawaddy*, 30 July 2024.

<sup>115</sup> Naing, S. et al., 'Insight: How an anxious China is backing Myanmar's faltering junta in civil war', *Reuters*, 25 Oct. 2024.

<sup>116</sup> de Waal, T., 'Armenia and Azerbaijan: A fragile peace process', *Strategic Europe*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 19 Sep. 2024.

<sup>117</sup> Byman, D., 'What to make of the ISIS-K attack on Moscow', *Lawfare*, 27 Mar. 2024; and Osborn, A., 'Dagestan shootings spotlight rising Islamist threat for Putin', *Reuters*, 25 June 2024.

(while tending to inflate the other's losses), one journalistic investigation based on open sources (e.g. obituaries and information from cemeteries) estimated that by September 2024 Russia alone had lost more than 70 000 troops in Ukraine.<sup>118</sup> In a rare admission of war casualties, in December 2024 Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky said that 43 000 Ukrainian soldiers have been killed, while also claiming that 198 000 Russian soldiers had died.<sup>119</sup> In addition to combatant casualties, the United Nations estimates that about 12 500 civilians have been killed in the war since 24 February 2022.<sup>120</sup>

The Russia–Ukraine war has featured grinding artillery and UAV strikes along a heavily fortified front stretching for nearly 1000 kilometres and involving hundreds of thousands of soldiers. After small but steady Russian gains in the east in the first half of 2024, Ukraine launched a cross-border offensive into Russia's Kursk oblast in August, hoping that Russia would divert thousands of troops from occupied Ukrainian territory to counter the threat.<sup>121</sup> But with superiority in troops and materials, Russia continued to make steady military gains in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine. On 1 October it captured the town of Vuhledar, Donetsk oblast, which Ukraine had defended for over two years.<sup>122</sup> Shortages of ammunition caused by political deadlock in the US Congress and a lack of production capacity in Ukraine's European supporters reportedly contributed to Ukraine's difficulties.<sup>123</sup> From November, briefings from Western officials became more pessimistic about Ukraine's military situation.<sup>124</sup> At the end of the year, Russia controlled just under one-fifth of Ukrainian territory.<sup>125</sup>

Russia also continued to launch repeated air attacks on Kyiv and other large cities with the goal of damaging infrastructure and morale.<sup>126</sup> In June 2024 the ICC issued arrest warrants for two senior Russian officials associated with

<sup>118</sup> Ivshina, O., 'Volunteers dying as Russia's war dead tops 70,000', BBC, 20 Sep. 2024. See also Kovalev, A., 'Putin is throwing human waves at Ukraine but can't do it forever', *Foreign Policy*, 25 Nov. 2024.

<sup>119</sup> Binley, A. and Beale, J., '43,000 troops killed in war with Russia, Zelensky says', BBC, 8 Dec. 2024.

<sup>120</sup> United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'Ukraine: Protection of civilians in armed conflict—December 2024 update', 9 Jan. 2025.

<sup>121</sup> Méheut, C., 'Ukraine launches rare cross-border ground assault into Russia', *New York Times*, 7 Aug. 2024.

<sup>122</sup> Harding, L., 'Ukraine says its forces have withdrawn from defensive bastion of Vuhledar', *The Guardian*, 2 Oct. 2024.

<sup>123</sup> Watling, J., 'The peril of Ukraine's ammo shortage', *Time*, 19 Feb. 2024; and Grey, S., Shiffman, J. and Martell, A., 'Years of miscalculations by US, NATO led to dire shell shortage in Ukraine', Reuters, 19 July 2024.

<sup>124</sup> Barnes, J. E. et al., 'As Russia advances, US fears Ukraine has entered a grim phase', *New York Times*, 1 Nov. 2024.

<sup>125</sup> Rajvanshi, A., 'Ukraine faces a tough 2025 with Putin's momentum and Trump presidency', NBC News, 1 Jan. 2025.

<sup>126</sup> Polityuk, P., Balmforth, T. and Dysa, Y., 'Russia strikes Ukraine's power grid in "most massive" attack of war', Reuters, 27 Aug. 2024. On the use of missiles in the Russia–Ukraine war see also chapter 7, section II, in this volume. On damage to the nuclear energy infrastructure see chapter 8, section V, in this volume.

missile attacks on civilian targets.<sup>127</sup> Ukraine also continued to strike military and economic targets deep inside Russia, as well as conducting sabotage and assassination attacks in occupied Ukrainian territory and inside Russia (some apparently carried out by Russian groups opposed to the government).<sup>128</sup> Ukraine criticized the restrictions on some Western-supplied weapons that limited its ability to hit targets far behind the front lines. Some of those restrictions were eventually lifted in November.<sup>129</sup> Ukrainian special forces also reportedly carried out attacks on Russian-backed forces and mercenary groups in Mali, Sudan and Syria.<sup>130</sup>

#### *North Korea's entry into the war*

In October 2024 North Korea directly entered the war on the side of Russia. The two countries had signed a strategic partnership treaty in June that provides for a military alliance between them.<sup>131</sup> About 3000 troops arrived in Russia from North Korea between early and mid October and it reportedly planned to send a total of 10 000–12 000 troops by the end of the year, with the prospect of additional units in 2025.<sup>132</sup> Reports suggested that more than 1000 of the North Korean soldiers had been killed or wounded by 31 December 2024.<sup>133</sup>

While the presence of these troops in these numbers is unlikely to be decisive on the battlefield—they constitute about 2 per cent of the estimated half a million Russian troops in Ukraine—the deployment could further escalate and globalize the conflict.

<sup>127</sup> Roth, A. and Sauer, P., 'ICC issues arrest warrants for Russian officials over alleged Ukraine war crimes', *The Guardian*, 25 June 2024. On alleged war crimes related to weapon use in the Russia–Ukraine war see Davis (note 40), pp. 474–81.

<sup>128</sup> E.g. Livermore, D. and Noyes, A., 'Railroading Russia through unconventional warfare', *Newsweek*, 6 Nov. 2024; Sauer, P., 'Russian naval officer accused of "war crimes" killed in Crimea car bombing', *The Guardian*, 13 Nov. 2024; and Sauer, P. and Harding, L., 'Russian general in charge of chemical weapons unit killed in Moscow scooter blast', *The Guardian*, 18 Dec. 2024.

<sup>129</sup> Sabbagh, D., 'Letting Ukraine fire missiles into Russia unlikely to have decisive effect', *The Guardian*, 18 Nov. 2024.

<sup>130</sup> 'Did Ukraine special forces strike Russia forces at a Syrian airbase?', *New Arab*, 1 Aug. 2024; Kirichenko, D., 'Ukraine is taking the fight to Russia in Africa, Syria', *The Hill*, 2 July 2024; and Ajala, O., 'Russia-Ukraine war spills into west Africa: Mali attacks signal dangerous times ahead', *The Conversation*, 16 Aug. 2024.

<sup>131</sup> President of Russia, 'Order on signing a Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the Russian Federation and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea', 18 June 2024; and Cha, V. and Kim, E., 'The New Russia–North Korea security alliance', *Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)*, 20 June 2024.

<sup>132</sup> Altman, H., 'Nearly 11,000 North Korean troops in Russia preparing to enter the fight says Ukraine's spy boss', *The Warzone*, 18 Oct. 2024; and Barners, J. E., Schmitt, E. and Schwirtz, M., '50,000 Russian and North Korean troops mass ahead of attack, US says', *New York Times*, 10 Nov. 2024.

<sup>133</sup> McCurry, J., 'More than 1,000 North Korean military casualties in Ukraine war, says South Korea', *The Guardian*, 23 Dec. 2024.



*Stalled diplomacy*

There were no formal peace talks between Russia and Ukraine in the course of 2024. Ukraine's vision for peace was initially set out in a 10-point peace plan in November 2022 and discussed at a series of regional peace conferences in 2023.<sup>134</sup> In June 2024 Ukraine and Switzerland convened an international conference attended by more than 90 countries that aimed to showcase global support for President Zelensky's peace formula. However, the final communiqué mentioned only the 3 least contentious of Zelensky's 10 points—the importance of nuclear safety, food security and the return of prisoners—while key countries from the Global South, such as India, Saudi Arabia and South Africa, did not sign the document.<sup>135</sup> China did not attend. In May, China and Brazil had presented a joint proposal for peace talks.<sup>136</sup> In September they issued a joint communiqué along with 11 other countries calling for a 'comprehensive and lasting settlement' to the conflict.<sup>137</sup>

Although Russia was not invited to the Swiss summit, Russian President Vladimir Putin indicated two conditions for talks: complete Ukrainian troop withdrawal from the four Ukrainian oblasts (Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia) that Russia claims as its own (along with Crimea) but does not fully control; and that Ukraine renounce its ambitions to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).<sup>138</sup> In September Putin said that Russia was ready for talks, but only on the basis of an aborted deal reached by the two sides' negotiators in Istanbul in April 2022.<sup>139</sup> These talks, just weeks after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, reportedly made substantial progress towards reaching an agreement to end the war, but the terms of the deal were never made public.<sup>140</sup>

It was anticipated that the re-election of Donald J. Trump as US president would lead to a serious re-evaluation of US policy towards the war in Ukraine in 2025. Under the administration of US President Joe Biden, the United States and its NATO allies said that they would support Ukraine with

<sup>134</sup> President of Ukraine, 'Ukraine has always been a leader in peacemaking efforts; if Russia wants to end this war, let it prove it with actions—Speech by the President of Ukraine at the G20 Summit', 15 Nov. 2022. On diplomatic efforts in 2023 see Gowan (note 97), pp. 44–45.

<sup>135</sup> Summit on Peace in Ukraine, Joint Communiqué on a Peace Framework, Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs, 16 June 2024; and Shidore, S., 'Why these countries turned their backs on Ukraine "peace" doc', Responsible Statecraft, 17 June 2024.

<sup>136</sup> Brazilian Government, 'Brazil and China present joint proposal for peace negotiations with the participation of Russia and Ukraine', 23 May 2024.

<sup>137</sup> Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Joint communiqué', 27 Sep. 2024.

<sup>138</sup> President of Russia, 'Meeting with Foreign Ministry senior officials', 14 June 2024. For a list of existing members of NATO see annex B, section II, in this volume.

<sup>139</sup> AFP, 'Putin says Russia ready for talks with Ukraine', *Le Monde*, 5 Sep. 2024.

<sup>140</sup> E.g. Charap, S. and Radchenko, S., 'The talks that could have ended the war in Ukraine', *Foreign Affairs*, 16 Apr. 2024; and Troianovski, A., Entous, A. and Schwirtz, M., 'Ukraine–Russia peace is as elusive as ever. But in 2022 they were talking', *New York Times*, 15 June 2024.



weapons and aid for ‘as long as it takes’ to defeat Russia.<sup>141</sup> In June 2024 other NATO members attempted to make assistance to Ukraine less susceptible to a change in US policy by taking on a bigger role in coordinating the supply of weapons to Ukraine.<sup>142</sup> However, without US support the value of arms projected to be supplied in 2025 would fall from €59 billion (\$64 billion) to €34 billion (\$37 billion).<sup>143</sup> While campaigning, Trump promised to end the conflict in 24 hours, but at the end of 2024 it remained unclear how he would seek to achieve this.<sup>144</sup>

## VII. Conflict dynamics in the Middle East and North Africa

Hamas’s 7 October 2023 attack on Israel and the subsequent war in Gaza that Israel launched in response continued to reshape the region in 2024.<sup>145</sup> The human toll in Gaza rose enormously, with over 45 500 Palestinians dead (see below), 90 per cent of the population displaced and much of the area reduced to rubble and uninhabitable. The war also spilled beyond Gaza on multiple fronts. Most directly, violence in the West Bank rose to record levels following increased Israeli military raids and attacks by settlers. More broadly, Israeli initiated an offensive against the so-called ‘axis of resistance’—an informal network of groups allied with Iran that, in addition to Hamas in Gaza, includes Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, government-backed militias in Syria and parts of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) in Iraq.<sup>146</sup> After months of exchanges of fire between Hezbollah and Israel, Israel stepped up its air strikes and launched a ground campaign in Lebanon, while the Iran–Israel conflict escalated beyond a proxy war to a series of direct exchanges of fire. This heightened the risk of a wider confrontation between, on one side, Israel and the United States and, on the other, Iran and its partners across the region.

<sup>141</sup> E.g. NATO–Ukraine Council, Statement, 11 July 2024.

<sup>142</sup> NATO, ‘NATO Defence Ministers agree plan to lead coordination of security assistance and training for Ukraine, address deterrence and defence’, News release, 14 June 2024.

<sup>143</sup> Kiel Institute for the World Economy, ‘Ukraine Support Tracker: Aid could drop significantly from 2025’, 10 Oct. 2024. On the value of military aid to Ukraine in 2024 see chapter 3, section III, in this volume.

<sup>144</sup> Irwin, L., ‘Trump vows to “bring peace” after “very good call” with Zelensky’, The Hill, 19 July 2024. See also Slattery, G. and Lewis, S., ‘Trump handed plan to halt US military aid to Kyiv unless it talks peace with Moscow’, Reuters, 25 June 2024.

<sup>145</sup> On the history of Israel’s occupation of the Gaza Strip, Golan Heights and West Bank (territories it captured in the 1967 Arab–Israeli War)—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).

<sup>146</sup> Ataie, M., ‘How the axis of resistance is shaping the Middle East’, Middle East Eye, 14 Oct. 2024; and Mansour, R., ‘The axis of resilience’, *Foreign Affairs*, 13 Nov. 2024.

**Table 2.8.** Estimated conflict-related fatalities in the Middle East and North Africa, 2018–24

Fatality figures are collated from 4 event types: battles; explosions and remote violence; protests, riots and strategic developments; and violence against civilians.<sup>a</sup> A country is treated as being in an armed conflict in a given year if there were 25 or more battle-related deaths in that year or, exceptionally, when fatalities in the ‘explosions and remote violence’ category exceed 100.

Country	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Egypt	1 115	1 003	626	264	273	24 <sup>b</sup>	15 <sup>b</sup>
Iran	258	478	435	220	737	214	364
Iraq	5 224	3 460	2 675	2 598	2 098	1 369	965
Israel–Palestine	420	195	52 <sup>b</sup>	361	257	24 146 <sup>c</sup>	29 901 <sup>c</sup>
Lebanon	36 <sup>b</sup>	25 <sup>b</sup>	48	74	53	256	3 818
Libya	1 226	2 294	1 563	115	166	90	150
Saudi Arabia	1 514	1 043	54	20 <sup>d</sup>	89 <sup>d</sup>	193	12 <sup>d</sup>
Syria	30 226	15 629	8 449	6 114	6 093	6 317	6 888
Türkiye	991	559	359	213	218	148	55
Yemen	34 275	28 012	19 801	18 407	6 519	2 148	1 814
<b>Total</b>	<b>75 285</b>	<b>52 698</b>	<b>34 062</b>	<b>28 386</b>	<b>16 503</b>	<b>34 905</b>	<b>43 982</b>
No. of countries in armed conflict	9	9	9	9	9	9	8

<sup>a</sup> Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), ‘Armed Conflict Location & Event Data codebook’, 3 Oct. 2024.

<sup>b</sup> Battle-related deaths totalled less than the threshold of 25 in this year.

<sup>c</sup> These figures may be underestimates.

<sup>d</sup> Battle-related deaths and deaths from explosions and remote violence totalled less than the respective thresholds of 25 and 100 in this year.

Source: ACLED Explorer, accessed 24 Jan. 2025.

Israel’s actions also inadvertently contributed to the unexpected and rapid collapse of the government of President Bashar al-Assad in Syria.<sup>147</sup> Without the support of Hezbollah and Iran, and with Russia distracted in Ukraine, the Syrian armed forces melted away in the face of rebel advances in late November and early December. This took the 13-year Syrian civil war into an uncertain endgame. Meanwhile, the region’s other armed conflicts in Iraq, Libya, Türkiye and Yemen have reduced in intensity in recent years without necessarily reaching any sustainable resolutions. Conflict-related fatalities in Saudi Arabia dropped below the threshold for armed conflict in 2024, reducing the number of states in the region that are the location of an armed conflict from nine to eight (see table 2.8).

### The Israel–Hammas war

Following the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on 7 October 2023, Israel launched an intensive military campaign in Gaza with the stated aims of

<sup>147</sup> Douek, D. L., ‘How Israel’s regional war contributed to the fall of Bashar al-Assad in Syria’, *The Conversation*, 11 Dec. 2024.

destroying Hamas's military and governing capabilities and rescuing the 251 hostages taken during the assault.<sup>148</sup> Israel's subsequent prosecution of the war in Gaza included ground assaults with about 40 000 combat troops and massive air strikes that damaged over half of all buildings and targeted or hit mosques and churches, hospitals, schools, emergency shelters and United Nations and other humanitarian operations, as well as areas previously designated by Israel as 'safe zones'.<sup>149</sup> The stark consequences of the war included a high death toll, the destruction of food systems and a severe humanitarian crisis in Gaza, including a warning in November 2024 by a committee of global food security experts of a 'strong likelihood that famine is imminent in areas [of] northern Gaza'.<sup>150</sup>

According to Oxfam, the daily death toll in Gaza in January 2024 (averaging 250 people killed per day) was surpassing any other major conflict of the 21st century, with many more indirect deaths likely due to acute food insecurity and diseases.<sup>151</sup> By the end of 2024 the death toll in Gaza had reached 45 541 according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Gaza.<sup>152</sup> Most were civilians and a UN analysis of verified deaths during the first six months of the war found that nearly 70 per cent of the fatalities were women and children.<sup>153</sup> While figures reported by the Ministry of Health are widely regarded as reliable, two research studies published in *The Lancet* medical journal suggest that the total death toll could be substantially higher.<sup>154</sup>

UNRWA, the UN architecture for assisting Palestinians, was subject to physical and political attacks. Between 7 October 2023 and 31 December 2024,

<sup>148</sup> Israeli Prime Minister's Office, Statement, 25 Oct. 2023. On the Hamas attack and the Israeli response in 2023 see Gowan (note 97), pp. 47–55.

<sup>149</sup> E.g. Erden, B., Bowley, G. and Safie, T., 'Gaza's historic heart, now in ruins', *New York Times*, 28 May 2024; Stack, L. and Shbair, B., 'With schools in ruins, education in Gaza will be hobbled for years', *New York Times*, 6 May 2024; and Neuman, S., Baba, A. and Wood, D., 'In Gaza, months of war have left Palestinians with barely the necessities to survive', NPR, 1 June 2024. On the weapons used by Israel in Gaza see Woodall Gillard, L., 'Israel's dirty dozen: The IDF's most lethal weapons in Gaza', *Action on Armed Violence*, 5 Nov. 2024.

<sup>150</sup> Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), 'IPC Famine Review Committee alert: Gaza Strip', 8 Nov. 2024; and Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), 'Gaza: Immediate action must combine emergency relief with the restoration of local food production', 28 Jan. 2025.

<sup>151</sup> Oxfam, 'Daily death rate in Gaza higher than any other major 21st Century conflict—Oxfam', 11 Jan. 2024.

<sup>152</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 'Reported impact snapshot: Gaza Strip', 31 Dec. 2024.

<sup>153</sup> United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Six-month Update Report on the Human Rights Situation in Gaza: 1 November 2023 to 30 April 2024* (OHCHR: New York, 8 Nov. 2024).

<sup>154</sup> Khatib, R., McKee, M. and Yusuf, S., 'Counting the dead in Gaza: Difficult but essential', *The Lancet*, 20 July 2024; and Jamaluddine, Z. et al., 'Traumatic injury mortality in the Gaza Strip from Oct 7, 2023, to June 30, 2024: A capture–recapture analysis', *The Lancet*, 8 Feb. 2025. On the reliability of the figures see Graham-Harrison, E., 'Gaza publishes identities of 34,344 Palestinians killed in war with Israel', *The Guardian*, 17 Sep. 2024; and Kouddous, S. A., 'How the Health Ministry in Gaza counts the dead', *Drop Site News*, 25 Sep. 2024.

258 UNRWA staff members were killed in the fighting.<sup>155</sup> Political attacks from Israel and its supporters led major donors to suspend \$450 million in UNRWA's funding and culminated in the Israeli government informing the UN secretary-general in November 2024 that it would withdraw from the 1967 agreement that provided the basis for its cooperation with the agency.<sup>156</sup> A UN General Assembly resolution calling for Israel to reverse the new laws banning UNRWA and to 'allow and facilitate full, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian assistance' into Gaza passed with 159 states in support, 9 against and 11 abstaining.<sup>157</sup> The war also took a heavy toll on journalists, with 163 killed in Gaza and, in some cases, the West Bank and Lebanon.<sup>158</sup>

### *International diplomacy*

Despite growing international concerns about the conduct of the war, international diplomacy was unable to stop the fighting in Gaza and prevent it from spreading. The United States continued to position itself as the central diplomatic player, while simultaneously supplying arms and ammunition to Israel and strengthening its own military posture in the region.<sup>159</sup> The Arab states of the Gulf, particularly Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), were also at the forefront of diplomacy and humanitarian assistance: Qatar, supported by Egypt and the USA, pursued a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel, and the UAE led aid initiatives for Gaza.<sup>160</sup> Saudi Arabia, having previously championed a process whereby Palestinian statehood would be exchanged for normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel, launched in September a global alliance to push for a two-state solution.<sup>161</sup>

<sup>155</sup> Lazzarini, P., 'Fifteen months on the war in Gaza horrors continue unabated under the world's watch', UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), 31 Dec. 2024.

<sup>156</sup> Berman, L., 'Israel informs UN that 1967 agreement recognizing UNRWA is void', *Times of Israel*, 4 Nov. 2024; Borger, J., 'Israel still has no proof of UNRWA terrorist claims—but damage to aid agency is done', *The Guardian*, 22 Apr. 2024; Nicas (note 49); and Agreement between UNRWA and the Government of Israel for the Purpose of Enabling UNRWA to Continue to Provide Services to Refugees in Areas under the Control of the Government of Israel, 14 June 1967, annex III of UN document A/6713.

<sup>157</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution ES-10/25, 'Support for the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East', 11 Dec. 2024. See also United Nations, General Assembly, 'General Assembly adopts resolutions demanding immediate ceasefire in Gaza, Israel to allow UN Palestine Refugee Agency to carry out aid operations unrestricted', Meetings coverage, GA/12667, 11 Dec. 2024.

<sup>158</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, Database of attacks on the press, accessed 28 Jan. 2025.

<sup>159</sup> Britzky, H., Mullery, W. and O'Kruk, A., 'The US has strengthened its military posture in the Middle East amid unrest. Here's where those assets are deployed', CNN, 4 Oct. 2024. On US arms supplies to Israel see chapter 5, sections III and IV, in this volume.

<sup>160</sup> US Department of State, 'Secretary Antony J. Blinken and Qatari Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani at a joint press availability', 6 Feb. 2024; and International Crisis Group (ICG), 'Egypt's Gaza dilemmas', Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Briefing no. 91, 16 May 2024.

<sup>161</sup> 'Saudi Arabia forms global alliance to push for Israel–Palestine two-state solution', Middle East Monitor, 27 Sep. 2024.

None of these efforts was able to alter the conflict's trajectory, and most of the diplomatic efforts were undermined as the war expanded into Lebanon.

The United Nations and other international mechanisms also proved to be ineffective. The USA had previously vetoed UN Security Council resolutions calling for a ceasefire, but on 25 March 2024 its abstention in a vote allowed a resolution on a temporary ceasefire to pass.<sup>162</sup> No ceasefire was forthcoming and in May Israel submitted a three-part peace plan to the USA and fellow mediators Qatar and Egypt, which the USA then proposed as a new Security Council resolution. That resolution passed in June with the abstention of Russia.<sup>163</sup> The Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, nonetheless refused to accept a ceasefire and continued to seek 'total victory'.<sup>164</sup> Another Security Council ceasefire resolution in November was vetoed by the USA.<sup>165</sup>

Pressure on states to cease or curtail military exports to Israel also grew throughout the year.<sup>166</sup> On 18 September 2024 the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution calling on states to cease the 'provision or transfer of arms, munitions and related equipment to Israel . . . in all cases where there are reasonable grounds to suspect that they may be used in the Occupied Palestinian Territory'.<sup>167</sup> Reflecting the international divisions on this issue, the resolution was passed with 124 states in favour, 14 against and 43 abstentions. Supplies of military assistance to Israel from the USA alone were estimated to be worth about \$17.9 billion in the 12 months following the start of the war in Gaza.<sup>168</sup>

A further General Assembly resolution in December calling for a permanent and unconditional ceasefire, the release of hostages, the delivery of humanitarian aid and the protection of civilians passed with 158 states

<sup>162</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 2728, 25 Mar. 2024; and United Nations, 'Gaza: Security Council passes resolution demanding "an immediate ceasefire" during Ramadan', UN News, 25 Mar. 2024.

<sup>163</sup> Debusmann, B. and Bateman, T., 'Biden unveils Israeli proposal to end Gaza war', BBC, 1 June 2024; UN Security Council Resolution 2735, 10 June 2024; and United Nations, Security Council, 'Adopting Resolution 2735 (2024) with 14 votes in favour, Russian Federation abstaining, Security Council welcomes new Gaza ceasefire proposal, urges full implementation', Meetings coverage, SC/15723, 10 June 2024.

<sup>164</sup> Knickmeyer, E., Amiri, F. and Khalil, A., 'In fiery speech to Congress, Netanyahu vows "total victory" in Gaza and denounces US protesters', AP, 25 July 2024.

<sup>165</sup> United Nations, 'United States vetoes Gaza ceasefire resolution at Security Council', UN News, 20 Nov. 2024.

<sup>166</sup> Hussain, Z., 'How top arms exporters have responded to the war in Gaza', SIPRI, 3 Oct. 2024. On arms transfers to Israel see also chapter 5, section IV, in this volume.

<sup>167</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution ES-10/24, 'Advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legal consequences arising from Israel's policies and practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and from the illegality of Israel's continued presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory', 18 Sep. 2024, 19 Sep. 2024, para. 5(b); and United Nations, 'UN General Assembly demands Israel end "unlawful presence" in Occupied Palestinian Territory', UN News, 18 Sep. 2024.

<sup>168</sup> Bilmes, L. J., Hartung, W. D. and Semler, S., 'United States spending on Israel's military operations and related US operations in the region, October 7, 2023–September 30, 2024', Costs of War, Brown University, Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, 7 Oct. 2024.

voting in support, 9 against and 13 abstaining.<sup>169</sup> At the end of the year, it seemed likely that a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel would be agreed in January, seeding hopes of an end to 15 months of devastating war in Gaza and the ordeal of the remaining Israeli hostages.<sup>170</sup>

### *International law*

In January 2024 the International Court of Justice (ICJ) gave a provisional ruling in a case brought by South Africa alleging that Israel was committing genocide in Gaza. Israel was instructed, among other things, to take immediate steps to prevent its military from committing acts that might be considered genocidal and to enable the provision of humanitarian assistance in Gaza.<sup>171</sup> The court also called for the 'immediate and unconditional release' of the hostages held by Hamas and other groups. In May the court additionally ordered Israel to 'immediately halt its military offensive . . . in the Rafah Governorate [in the far south of Gaza]', while also reiterating its call for release of the hostages.<sup>172</sup> The following month, a UN commission of inquiry found that both Hamas and Israel had been responsible for multiple war crimes since 7 October 2023.<sup>173</sup> In July the ICJ issued an advisory opinion concluding that Israel's 57-year-long occupation and annexation of Palestinian territory to be unlawful.<sup>174</sup>

In November a UN special committee to investigate Israeli practices reported serious concerns of breaches of international humanitarian and human rights laws, including starvation as a weapon of war and 'the possibility of genocide'.<sup>175</sup> Later that month the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Yoav Gallant, Israeli defence minister during the first

<sup>169</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution ES-10/26, 'Demand for ceasefire in Gaza', 11 Dec. 2024. See also United Nations, GA/12667 (note 157).

<sup>170</sup> Wintour, P., 'Gaza peace deal possible before Trump inauguration, Qatar's PM says', *The Guardian*, 7 Dec. 2024.

<sup>171</sup> International Court of Justice (ICJ), 'Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel): Request for the indication of provisional measures', Summary no. 2024/1, 26 Jan. 2024, p. 7.

<sup>172</sup> International Court of Justice (ICJ), 'Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel): Request for the modification of the Order of 28 March 2024', Summary no. 2024/6, 24 May 2024, p. 4.

<sup>173</sup> United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, 14 June 2024, paras 90, 97; and United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 'Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory concludes that Israeli authorities and Hamas are both responsible for war crimes', 19 June 2024.

<sup>174</sup> International Court of Justice (ICJ), 'Legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem', Advisory opinion, 19 July 2024.

<sup>175</sup> United Nations, General Assembly, Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, A/79/363, 20 Sep. 2024, p. 2; and United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 'UN Special Committee finds Israel's warfare methods in Gaza consistent with genocide, including use of starvation as weapon of war', Press release, 14 Nov. 2024.

year of the war, and Netanyahu for crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in Gaza.<sup>176</sup> The ICC also issued an arrest warrant for Mohammed Deif, Hamas military commander. The ICC chief prosecutor had applied for these warrants in May along with warrants for Hamas leaders Ismail Haniyeh and Yahya Sinwar, although Haniyeh and Sinwar were subsequently killed and Israel claimed to have killed Deif in July.<sup>177</sup> Both Hamas and Israel rejected the allegations made by the ICC and international opinion was split on the issue, meaning in practice that some ICC members may refuse to act on the warrants.<sup>178</sup>

A report from Amnesty International in December alleged that Israel's war in Gaza constituted genocide, the first such determination by a major human rights organization in the 14-month-old conflict.<sup>179</sup> Within days, several other human rights and humanitarian organizations drew similar conclusions.<sup>180</sup>

### Israel and the West Bank

Armed violence in the occupied West Bank, where 3 million Palestinians and about 730 000 Israeli settlers live (230 000 within East Jerusalem), also increased in 2024.<sup>181</sup> Attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinian communities escalated: in the first year of the war in Gaza, there were over 1000 incidents of settler violence in the West Bank, in which over 1300 Palestinians were driven from their homes.<sup>182</sup> Israeli military action also became more destructive, including the resumption of air strikes on West Bank towns for the first time since the early 2000s.<sup>183</sup> Deaths of Palestinians, including

<sup>176</sup> International Criminal Court (ICC), 'Situation in the State of Palestine: ICC Pre-Trial Chamber I rejects the State of Israel's challenges to jurisdiction and issues warrants of arrest for Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant', Press release, 21 Nov. 2024.

<sup>177</sup> International Criminal Court (ICC), 'Statement of ICC Prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan KC: Applications for arrest warrants in the situation in the State of Palestine', 20 May 2024.

<sup>178</sup> Vohra, A., 'The EU's divisions over Israel and Gaza are widening', *World Politics Review*, 11 Oct. 2024; Lukiv, J., 'Biden says ICC war crimes arrest warrant "outrageous"', BBC, 22 Nov. 2024; and Keitner, C., 'The ICC's unsurprising decision on arrest warrants for Netanyahu, Gallant, and Deif', *Lawfare*, 25 Nov. 2024.

<sup>179</sup> Amnesty International (AI), *'You Feel Like You are Subhuman': Israel's Genocide against Palestinians in Gaza* (AI: London, Dec. 2024).

<sup>180</sup> European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights, 'Gaza and the matter of genocide: Q&A on the law and recent developments', Dec. 2024; Human Rights Watch (HRW), 'Israel's crime of extermination, acts of genocide in Gaza', 19 Dec. 2024; and Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), *Gaza: Life in a Death Trap* (MSF: Paris, Dec. 2024).

<sup>181</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), *Stemming Israeli Settler Violence at Its Root*, Middle East Report no. 246 (ICG: Brussels, 6 Sep. 2024), p. i.

<sup>182</sup> International Crisis Group (note 181), p. ii.

<sup>183</sup> Shalash, F., 'Israel dramatically increases aerial attacks on the occupied West Bank', *New Arab*, 9 Jan. 2025.



children, increased substantially, reportedly leading to an upsurge in support among Palestinians for armed resistance.<sup>184</sup>

### **Israel, Hezbollah and Lebanon**

Sporadic outbreaks of fire between Hezbollah—a Lebanese Shia Islamist political party and militant group—and Israel had occurred prior to October 2023, and these intensified in the early days of the Israel– Hamas war. Hezbollah began firing rockets at Israeli forces in the occupied Shebaa Farms area in support of its ally Hamas, while Israel retaliated with air strikes. For 11 months these exchanges grew in intensity, killing up to 600 people and displacing 110 000 in Lebanon, mostly from the south, as well as displacing 80 000 Israelis from northern Israel.<sup>185</sup>

In mid September 2024 Israel expanded its military campaign: first with unique attacks on Hezbollah communications devices and then with air raids in nearly all the Shiite-majority areas of the country. The air strikes killed Hassan Nasrallah, leader of Hezbollah, and several of its high-ranking commanders.<sup>186</sup> On 1 October Israel invaded Lebanese territory with the stated aim of dismantling Hezbollah infrastructure, such as rocket launchers and tunnels, in the border area.<sup>187</sup> By mid November the escalation in the fighting had caused the deaths of over 3300 Lebanese people across the country and had displaced over 1 million people, as well as about 100 Israeli deaths in northern Israel, the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights and southern Lebanon.<sup>188</sup> Peacekeepers with the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) were also injured in attacks, reportedly from both Israeli and Hezbollah forces.<sup>189</sup>

Nearly two months after Israel invaded Lebanon, a French- and US-brokered ceasefire was agreed by Hezbollah and Israel, which took effect on 27 November: Israel agreed to withdraw troops from Lebanon's south over a 60-day period, while Hezbollah agreed to move its fighters and weapons beyond the Litani River, about 25 km north of the border. Lebanese troops

<sup>184</sup> Graham-Harrison, E., Kierszenbaum Q. and Taha, S., ‘“Total oppression”: West Bank children being killed at unprecedented rate’, *The Guardian*, 19 Nov. 2024; and Barghouti, M., ‘How growing Israeli violence in the West Bank is fuelling Palestinian resistance’, *New Arab*, 12 Aug. 2024.

<sup>185</sup> Wimmen, H., Wood, D. and Zonszein, M., ‘Israel invades Lebanon: Precursors, prospects and pitfalls’, International Crisis Group, 8 Oct. 2024.

<sup>186</sup> Burke, J., ‘Which Hezbollah leaders have been killed and who will succeed Hassan Nasrallah?’, *The Guardian*, 29 Sep. 2024; and Carpenter, C., ‘Civilian casualties aren’t the only problem with Israel’s pager attack’, *World Politics Review*, 24 Sep. 2024. On the pager and walkie-talkie attacks see also chapter 11, section II, in this volume.

<sup>187</sup> Wimmen et al. (note 185).

<sup>188</sup> Burke, J., ‘Israeli strikes intensify on three fronts as Lebanon talks reach critical stage’, *The Guardian*, 14 Nov. 2024.

<sup>189</sup> Phillips, A., ‘Four Italian UN peacekeepers injured by rocket fire in Lebanon’, *BBC*, 22 Nov. 2024; and United Nations, ‘Israeli forces fire on UN peacekeepers in Lebanon’, *UN News*, 10 Oct. 2024.



were to redeploy to the south and began doing so in December.<sup>190</sup> The cease-fire was to be monitored by a US- and French-led supervisory mechanism that will mediate on infringements.<sup>191</sup> The extent to which Israel weakened Hezbollah and how long the ceasefire would hold remained unclear—but it was still in place at the end of 2024 despite violations.<sup>192</sup>

## Israel–Iran escalation

Iran and Israel have been waging a ‘shadow war’ for at least a decade, attacking each other indirectly using proxy forces, assassinations and hybrid, non-military covert means.<sup>193</sup> In 2024 this war emerged out of the shadows and escalated into direct missile and air strikes.

After the 7 October 2023 Hamas attack and the start of Israel’s offensive in Gaza, Iranian-backed ‘axis of resistance’ militias launched projectiles at both Israel and US forces to show collective support. In response, Israel stepped up air strikes on axis targets, especially in Syria.<sup>194</sup> A series of Israeli strikes on Syria in late 2023 and early 2024 culminated in an April attack that killed several senior commanders of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in an Iranian diplomatic building in Damascus.<sup>195</sup> In response, for the first time ever, Iran directly launched a barrage of hundreds of UAVs and cruise and ballistic missiles towards Israel. Most were intercepted and Israel reportedly suffered only light damage.<sup>196</sup> At least eight countries were involved in this military escalation, with projectiles fired from Iran and its proxies in Iraq, Syria and Yemen, and downed by forces of Israel, the United States, the United Kingdom and Jordan. Within days Israel responded with an air strike on an air defence system in central Iran and again in late July by killing the Hamas leader, Ismail Haniyah, in Tehran.<sup>197</sup>

<sup>190</sup> ‘Lebanese Army redeploys in Sour and border villages to “ensure security”’, *L’Orient Today*, 3 Dec. 2024.

<sup>191</sup> Deeb, J., ‘Full text of the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Lebanon’, *Middle East Eye*, 27 Nov. 2024.

<sup>192</sup> Hubbard, B., ‘A battered and diminished Hezbollah accepts a cease-fire’, *New York Times*, 27 Nov. 2024.

<sup>193</sup> On the historical ties between Israel and Iran see Ansari, A. M., ‘The shallow roots of Iran’s war with Israel’, *Foreign Affairs*, 29 May 2024.

<sup>194</sup> ‘Israeli airstrike in Syria kills senior Iranian Revolutionary Guards member’, Reuters, 26 Dec. 2023; and AP, ‘Israeli airstrike on Damascus killed at least 5 Iranian advisers, state media say’, NPR, 20 Jan. 2024.

<sup>195</sup> Wintour, P., ‘Iran vows revenge after two generals killed in Israeli strike on Syria consulate’, *The Guardian*, 1 Apr. 2024.

<sup>196</sup> Spender, T., ‘What was in wave of Iranian attacks and how were they thwarted?’, BBC, 15 Apr. 2024. For further details see also chapter 7, section III, in this volume.

<sup>197</sup> Lieber, D. et al., ‘Israel strikes Iran in narrow attack amid escalation fears’, *Wall Street Journal*, 19 Apr. 2024; and Bergman, R., Mazzetti, M. and Fassihi, F., ‘Bomb smuggled into Tehran guesthouse months ago killed Hamas leader’, *New York Times*, 1 Aug. 2024.

By August at least 34 Israeli attacks had led to the death of at least 39 commanders and senior members of Hamas, Hezbollah and the IRGC in Lebanon, Syria and Iran over a 10-month period.<sup>198</sup> In October, days after an Israeli air strike killed Nasrallah in Beirut and the same week that Israel began a limited ground invasion of southern Lebanon, Iran launched a second, larger wave of missiles towards Israel. Again, most of the missiles were intercepted, but satellite images suggested that at least two Israeli airbases sustained damage.<sup>199</sup> In turn, Israel responded with air strikes on Iranian military bases.<sup>200</sup>

Despite these escalating exchanges, the physical distance between the two countries and other factors suggests that a full-scale war between Iran and Israel remains unlikely. Instead, any expansion in the conflict is likely to involve much more of the same: irregular attacks carried out by aircraft, missiles, UAVs and cyberweapons, plus some covert operations and terrorist attacks.<sup>201</sup>

### **Israel, the Houthis and the Yemen peace process**

Yemen's civil war continued in 2024 with low-level clashes between the parties and little amelioration of its humanitarian crisis.<sup>202</sup> The Houthi movement (formally, Ansar Allah) has controlled much of northern and central Yemen since 2014, and the group is opposed by a range of forces in the south and east of the country.<sup>203</sup> After Hamas and Hezbollah, it is the 'axis of resistance' group most deeply involved in the post-7 October 2023 conflict, mainly through attacks on cargo ships in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, as well as attacks on US warships with UAVs and ballistic missiles.<sup>204</sup> From January 2024 the United States and the United Kingdom responded by launching air strikes against Houthi positions in Yemen.<sup>205</sup> The Houthis also launched direct attacks on Tel Aviv in July and September, prompting Israel to respond each time with air strikes on the Red Sea port of Hudaydah.<sup>206</sup>

The Red Sea crisis also derailed the already faltering Yemen peace process.<sup>207</sup> In December 2023 the UN-recognized government and the Houthis

<sup>198</sup> Mehvar, A., 'Israel's assassinations outside Palestine', ACLED Insight, 1 Aug. 2024.

<sup>199</sup> Brumfiel, G., 'Satellite images show dozens of Iranian missiles struck near Israeli air base', NPR, 4 Oct. 2024. See also chapter 7, section III, in this volume.

<sup>200</sup> Bennett, T., 'What we know about Israel's attack on Iran', BBC, 26 Oct. 2024.

<sup>201</sup> Pollack, K. M., 'Is a full-scale Middle East war already here?', *Foreign Affairs*, 16 Oct. 2024.

<sup>202</sup> Salisbury, P., *Snakes and Ladders: The Regional and International Dimensions of Yemen's Civil War* (PeaceRep: Edinburgh, Feb. 2024).

<sup>203</sup> See e.g. Davis, I., 'Armed conflict and peace processes in Yemen', *SIPRI Yearbook 2022*; and earlier editions of the SIPRI Yearbook.

<sup>204</sup> Nereim, V. and Almosawa, S., 'Amid Gaza war and Red Sea attacks, Yemen's Houthis refuse to back down', *New York Times*, 20 Dec. 2023.

<sup>205</sup> 'UK, US carry out air strikes on Yemen, including Sanaa', Al Jazeera, 10 Nov. 2024; and International Crisis Group (ICG), 'What next after US and UK strikes on the Houthis?', 13 Jan. 2024.

<sup>206</sup> Cooney, C. and Adams, P., 'Israel vows "heavy price" for Houthi missile strike', BBC, 15 Sep. 2024.

<sup>207</sup> On developments in the peace process in 2023 see Gowan (note 88), p. 69.

had pledged to develop a road map for a new ceasefire, oil exports and opening up transport inside Yemen.<sup>208</sup> However, the announcement of a new political understanding was frozen, with all sides unwilling to commit to new talks.

### **The fall of the Assad regime in Syria**

In recent years a stalemate had prevailed in the 13-year civil war in Syria, with most analysts assuming the regime of President Bashar al-Assad to be in the ascendancy. In the first 10 months of 2024, amid a growing regional escalation, the government and a variety of armed groups and outside actors continued to clash on multiple fronts, while the United Nations-led peace process and other international frameworks for managing the war made no visible progress.

Violence continued across the country with no signs of a decisive change of battle lines or prospects until the end of November, when events took a dramatic turn. One of the largest Syrian armed opposition groups, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS, Levant Liberation Organization)—a former al-Qaeda affiliate that broke with the global jihadi movement in 2016—had controlled Idlib in the north-west since 2015. On 27 November HTS forces advanced from Idlib and took the country's second city, Aleppo (which Syrian government forces had recaptured from rebels in 2016).<sup>209</sup> From there, they moved south and entered Damascus on 8 December, prompting President Assad to flee the country. A family dynasty that had ruled Syria for 54 years fell in less than two weeks.<sup>210</sup>

In the wake of Assad's downfall the future for Syria remained uncertain. In an important step towards unifying the country, HTS announced that it would dissolve its armed wing and other militias, fusing them into a new national army.<sup>211</sup> Minorities were targeted by mobs in some locations with killings, looting and harassment, but overall there was little sectarian violence.<sup>212</sup> The future role of regional powers such as Iran, Israel and Türkiye is likely to be crucial, especially if they seek to further any relative gains.<sup>213</sup> Within days of the new regime, for example, Israel expanded its occupation of Syrian territory and carried out air strikes on strategic weapon stockpiles in multiple

<sup>208</sup> 'Yemen warring parties commit to ceasefire, UN-led peace process, says envoy', Al Jazeera, 23 Dec. 2023.

<sup>209</sup> Michaelson, R., 'Syrian rebels enter Aleppo three days into surprise offensive', *The Guardian*, 29 Nov. 2024.

<sup>210</sup> Christou, W., 'Syrian rebels reveal year-long plot that brought down Assad regime', *The Guardian*, 13 Dec. 2024.

<sup>211</sup> AFP, 'Syria ex-HTS military chief says to dissolve armed wing', Arab News, 18 Dec. 2024.

<sup>212</sup> Mroue, B., 'Sectarian violence in Syria has been less intense than feared since Assad's ouster', *The Hill*, 20 Dec. 2024.

<sup>213</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Regional perspectives on the House of Assad's fall', 17 Dec. 2024.

**Table 2.9.** Estimated conflict-related fatalities in sub-Saharan Africa, 2018–24

Fatality figures are collated from 4 event types: battles; explosions and remote violence; protests, riots and strategic developments; and violence against civilians.<sup>a</sup> A country is treated as being in an armed conflict in a given year if there were 25 or more battle-related deaths in that year.

Country	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
<i>West Africa</i>	8 836	10 960	15 226	16 982	21 520	23 364	23 294
Benin	31 <sup>b</sup>	37 <sup>b</sup>	64	93	182	227	253
Burkina Faso	303	2 220	2 304	2 374	4 246	8 505	7 526
Côte d'Ivoire	16 <sup>b</sup>	46 <sup>b</sup>	151	51 <sup>b</sup>	49	23 <sup>b</sup>	18 <sup>b</sup>
Ghana	25 <sup>b</sup>	47 <sup>b</sup>	76 <sup>b</sup>	52 <sup>b</sup>	142	196 <sup>b</sup>	163
Guinea	40 <sup>b</sup>	45 <sup>b</sup>	146	28 <sup>b</sup>	38 <sup>b</sup>	72 <sup>b</sup>	59 <sup>b</sup>
Mali	1 747	1 875	2 856	1 913	4 863	4 320	4 004
Niger	506	729	1 126	1 498	990	1 149	1 706
Nigeria	6 162	5 952	8 488	10 969	10 929	8 772	9 437
Togo	6 <sup>b</sup>	9 <sup>b</sup>	15 <sup>b</sup>	4 <sup>b</sup>	81	100	128
<i>Central Africa</i>	6 327	6 289	9 084	10 478	9 761	7 175	7 704
Angola	41 <sup>b</sup>	23 <sup>b</sup>	74	150 <sup>b</sup>	108	90 <sup>b</sup>	112
Cameroon	1 664	1 302	1 762	1 571	1 635	2 152	2 228
CAR	1 171	596	449	1 714	967	583	663
Chad	259	567	738	831	745	282	526
DRC	3 192	3 801	6 061	6 212	6 306	4 068	4 175
<i>East and Southern Africa</i>	11 436	10 135	14 321	19 905	20 655	31 983	34 554
Burundi	327	305	330	305	261	199	165
Ethiopia	1 579	670	4 373	9 222	6 931 <sup>c</sup>	4 053	10 195
Kenya	460	330	355	501	697	1 015	761
Madagascar	142	351	358	303	365	513	467
Mozambique	212	691	1 781	1 829	922	304	664
Somalia	5 800	5 048	3 495	3 425	6 607	8 375	5 445
South Sudan	1 716	1 801	2 382	2 156	2 435	1 288	1 078
Sudan	1 054	776	959	1 657	2 074	15 869	15 543
Uganda	146 <sup>b</sup>	163	288	507	363	367	236
<b>Total</b>	<b>26 599</b>	<b>27 384</b>	<b>38 631</b>	<b>47 365</b>	<b>51 936</b>	<b>62 522</b>	<b>65 552</b>
No. of countries in armed conflict	16	17	21	18	22	19	21

CAR = Central African Republic; DRC = Democratic Republic of the Congo.

<sup>a</sup> Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), 'Armed Conflict Location & Event Data codebook', 3 Oct. 2024.

<sup>b</sup> Battle-related deaths totalled less than the threshold of 25 in this year.

<sup>c</sup> This figure is likely to be a severe underestimate.

Source: ACLED Explorer, accessed 23 Jan. 2025.

locations inside Syria.<sup>214</sup> Similarly, armed factions backed by Türkiye exploited the new power dynamics to battle Kurdish-led forces in the north-east.<sup>215</sup> Reports also suggest a resurgence of the Islamic State group in Syria.<sup>216</sup>

## VIII. Conflict dynamics in sub-Saharan Africa

While sub-Saharan Africa remained the region with the highest number of states in which there was an armed conflict—21 in 2024, up from 19 in 2023—levels of violence varied considerably between countries. ACLED's figures point to declines in conflict-related fatalities in some countries experiencing high-intensity armed conflict, including Burkina Faso (down 12 per cent compared to 2023), Mali (down 7 per cent), Somalia (down 35 per cent) and South Sudan (down 16 per cent). Other armed conflicts escalated, with rises in death rates in the major armed conflict in Ethiopia (up 152 per cent) and the high-intensity armed conflict in Niger (up 48 per cent). The civil war in Sudan statistically overshadowed other cases, despite a small decline in estimated conflict-related fatalities in 2024 compared to 2023 (see table 2.9).

### The civil war in Sudan

Fighting broke out in Khartoum on 15 April 2023 between members of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Hostilities soon spread to other parts of the country and continued for the rest of the year, with the most serious violence beyond Khartoum centred on Darfur in the west of the country, where armed conflict had first erupted in 2003. The RSF, led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (also known as Hemedti), is a former state paramilitary organization associated with the Janjaweed militias that had wrought large-scale violence in the Darfur region in the 2000s. The SAF in turn is led by General Abdel Fattah Burhan, also head of Sudan's ruling military junta. In the last three months of 2023 the RSF had won a series of victories in Darfur and the east of Sudan, but this momentum stalled in 2024.<sup>217</sup>

In June the United Nations Security Council approved a resolution demanding that the RSF halt the siege of Al Fashir, capital of North Darfur, the only major population centre in Darfur still under SAF control and a

<sup>214</sup> Krever, M., 'Israel strikes Syria 480 times and seizes territory as Netanyahu pledges to change face of the Middle East', CNN, 11 Dec. 2024.

<sup>215</sup> Chehayeb, K. and Al Abdo, H., 'Kurdish-led forces push back Turkish-backed Syrian rebels in a tense offensive', *The Independent*, 24 Dec. 2024.

<sup>216</sup> Lucente, A., 'ISIS kills five Hezbollah-linked fighters in Syria: War monitor', *Al-Monitor*, 16 Sep. 2024; and US Central Command, 'CENTCOM forces kill ISIS leader during precision strike in Syria', Press release, 20 Dec. 2024.

<sup>217</sup> On the armed conflict in 2023 see Gowan (note 97), pp. 55–58.

city with key strategic and cultural importance to both sides.<sup>218</sup> However, in September the RSF launched a full-scale attack on the city, which was still ongoing at the end of the year.<sup>219</sup> In much of the country, however, the two sides remained locked in a destructive stalemate, exacerbated by increases in the number of local groups aligned with either of the two warring parties and fragmentation within many of those groups.<sup>220</sup> Despite a UN embargo on arms that may be used in Darfur, weapon transfers by several suspected state actors (including China, Russia, Serbia, Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen) continued to influence the direction and magnitude of the violence.<sup>221</sup> So too did international allies (Egypt is the main backer of the SAF and the UAE is the main supporter of the RSF).<sup>222</sup> In December fighting between the SAF and the RSF intensified across multiple fronts, including previously peaceful areas of White Nile and Blue Nile states in the south-east.<sup>223</sup>

In January 2024 the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court said that there were grounds to believe that both sides might be committing war crimes in Darfur.<sup>224</sup> In addition to widespread atrocities, including sexual violence, the war has created the world's worst displacement crisis, with nearly 13 million people fleeing their homes, including 3 million to neighbouring countries.<sup>225</sup> About 26 million Sudanese people faced severe food insecurity and in July famine was declared in several areas, including displacement camps such as Zamzam camp in Darfur.<sup>226</sup>

Efforts to end the war continued to be complicated by divisions among a variety of key international actors—the United States, the United Nations, Arab powers (including Egypt and the UAE), the European Union (EU), the African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)—that aimed to mediate the conflict. Moreover, the various attempts

<sup>218</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 2736, 13 June 2024.

<sup>219</sup> 'Sudan: Fighting breaks out in el-Fasher following RSF attack', Middle East Eye, 14 Sep. 2024.

<sup>220</sup> ACLED, 'Artillery shelling and airstrikes surge in Sudan', Situation Update, 16 Sep. 2024.

<sup>221</sup> Amnesty International (AI), *New Weapons Fuelling the Sudan Conflict: Expanding Existing Arms Embargo across Sudan to Protect Civilians* (AI: London, July 2024). On the UN arms embargo see chapter 15, section III, in this volume. On arms transfers to Sudan see chapter 5, section II, in this volume.

<sup>222</sup> 'Sudan accuses UAE of fueling war with weapons to paramilitary rivals', Africa News, 19 June 2024; and Ibrahim, E., 'Egypt's evolving diplomatic approach to Sudan's war', New Arab, 25 June 2024.

<sup>223</sup> 'Food clashes intensify amid mounting civilian toll', Dabanga, 17 Dec. 2024.

<sup>224</sup> International Criminal Court (ICC), 'Statement of ICC Prosecutor, Karim A.A. Khan KC, to the United Nations Security Council on the situation in Darfur, pursuant to Resolution 1593 (2005)', 30 Jan. 2024.

<sup>225</sup> Masore, N., 'Rape is being weaponised in Sudan's war with no justice in sight', New Arab, 27 Sep. 2024; Townsend, M. and Borger, J., 'Sudanese factions using starvation as weapon is "cowardice", US envoy says', *The Guardian*, 13 Aug. 2024; and UN High Commissioner for Refugees (note 43), p. 5. See also the findings in United Nations, A/HRC/57/23 (note 32).

<sup>226</sup> Food Security Information Network (note 49); and Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), 'Sudan: IPC acute food insecurity analysis, June 2024–February 2025', 22 July 2024.

to end the conflict lacked coherence and urgency.<sup>227</sup> Burhan was also reluctant to participate in mediation efforts.<sup>228</sup> A high-level donor conference held in Paris in April raised more than \$2 billion in aid pledges and convened important side discussions among Sudanese civil actors.<sup>229</sup> However, only 68 per cent of the Sudan Response Plan and less than 30 per cent of the Refugee Response Plan was funded in 2024.<sup>230</sup>

## Ethiopia

Ethiopia grappled with intensified armed conflicts in several regions during 2024. Most conflict deaths were concentrated in Amhara in the north of the country (with approximately 62 per cent of estimated Ethiopian conflict fatalities in 2024) and Oromia, the largest regional state by population and territory (with about 32 per cent of fatalities).

The 2022 peace agreement between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) continued to maintain a fragile peace in Tigray, despite the failure to implement many of its key provisions.<sup>231</sup> However, clashes erupted in February in territories disputed by Amhara and Tigray regions, and significant violence continued in other parts of the country.<sup>232</sup> In December 2024 the Ethiopian government agreed a ceasefire with the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), but the truce was violated almost immediately.<sup>233</sup> Conflict between the central government and various rebel groups in Oromia region has been ongoing since the early 1970s, and fighting between the government and the OLA persisted after a peace deal was reached with other rebel groups in 2018.<sup>234</sup>

<sup>227</sup> E.g. 'IGAD returns to Sudan negotiations with a peace envoy', *Africa Confidential*, 27 Mar. 2024; International Crisis Group (ICG), 'Sudan: A year of war', 11 Apr. 2024; and United Nations, Security Council, 'Recommendations for the protection of civilians in the Sudan', Report of the Secretary-General, S/2024/759, 21 Oct. 2024, paras 23–29. For brief descriptions and lists of members of the AU, the EU and IGAD see annex B, section II, in this volume.

<sup>228</sup> 'Al-Burhan rejects all mediation efforts to resolve Sudan crisis for personal gains', *I'm Arabic*, 13 July 2024.

<sup>229</sup> Surk, B. and Magdy, S., 'World donors pledge \$2.1 billion in aid for war-stricken Sudan to ward off famine', *AP*, 16 Apr. 2024.

<sup>230</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 'Sudan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024', [n.d.]; and UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 'Sudan emergency: Regional Refugee Response Plan 2024', [n.d.].

<sup>231</sup> Gebrehiwot Berhe, M., 'Towards a meaningful peace for Tigray: How to move from the "permanent cessation of hostilities agreement" to a durable peace', *World Peace Foundation*, Feb. 2024; and Harter, F., 'Two years later, Tigray's post-war recovery still hasn't begun', 12 Sep. 2024.

<sup>232</sup> Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO), 'Clashes in Tigray's disputed territories threaten peace deal', *EPO Monthly Update*, Feb. 2024.

<sup>233</sup> Tunbridge, G., 'Ethiopia signs peace deal with Oromo Liberation Army splinter group', *Africa Report*, 3 Dec. 2024; and 'Oromo Liberation Army attack in Oromia's Sululta district leaves two dead, including police chief', *Addis Standard*, 11 Dec. 2024.

<sup>234</sup> On the Eritrea–Ethiopia peace agreement in 2018 that laid the foundation for reconciliation with Ethiopian armed opposition groups see Davis, I. and Melvin, N., 'Armed conflict and peace processes in sub-Saharan Africa', *SIPRI Yearbook 2019*, pp. 135–36.



In January 2024 Ethiopia signed an agreement with the de facto independent region of Somaliland in the north of Somalia under which landlocked Ethiopia would reportedly exchange formal recognition for access to a port on the Gulf of Aden.<sup>235</sup> This strained relations between Ethiopia and Somalia, but in December talks mediated by Türkiye culminated in a pledge by the leaders of the two counties to resolve their differences through dialogue and to address shared concerns.<sup>236</sup>

## **Other conflicts in East and Southern Africa**

### *South Sudan*

Among Sudan's neighbours, those most immediately affected by the war in Sudan were Chad (see below) and South Sudan. In South Sudan, spillover from the civil war in Sudan included almost 1 million people registered as crossing from Sudan by the end of 2024 (South Sudan's population is roughly 12 million) and disruption to oil exports.<sup>237</sup> Intercommunal violence also continued across parts of the country in 2024.

In May the government of South Sudan and rebel opposition groups (not part of the 2018 agreement that ended South Sudan's five-year civil war) signed a 'commitment declaration' for peace during mediation talks in Kenya.<sup>238</sup> However, long-delayed national elections to choose leaders to succeed the current transitional government were postponed for two years, until December 2026, underscoring the challenges facing South Sudan's fragile peace process.<sup>239</sup>

### *Somalia*

In 2024 an estimated 6.9 million people in Somalia required humanitarian assistance, including more than 3.8 million IDPs.<sup>240</sup> The fight against al-Shabab, a transnational Islamist armed group affiliated to al-Qaeda, continued to pose the most significant threat to peace and security in Somalia and remained a pressing concern in Kenya and elsewhere in East Africa. It carried

<sup>235</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), 'The stakes in the Ethiopia–Somaliland deal', 6 Mar. 2024.

<sup>236</sup> Paravicini, G., 'Somalia to expel Ethiopian troops unless Somaliland port deal scrapped, official says', Reuters, 3 June 2024; and Yibeltal, K. and Rukanga, B., 'Ethiopia and Somalia agree to end bitter Somaliland port feud', BBC, 12 Dec. 2024.

<sup>237</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 'South Sudan: Humanitarian snapshot', Dec. 2024.

<sup>238</sup> Musambi, E., 'South Sudan government and rebel groups sign "commitment" for peace in ongoing peace talks in Kenya', AP, 16 May 2024.

<sup>239</sup> 'South Sudan postpones long-delayed election by two years, presidency says', Reuters, 13 Sep. 2024.

<sup>240</sup> United Nations, Security Council, 'Situation in Somalia', Report of the Secretary-General, S/2024/426, 3 June 2024.

out several high-profile attacks in Mogadishu during the year.<sup>241</sup> Islamic State Somalia, a rival militant Islamist group with a different affiliation, had a small but seemingly growing presence in Puntland, a semi-autonomous region in northern Somalia.<sup>242</sup>

While supporting government efforts against al-Shabab, the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) continued to draw down in accordance with the planned transition of responsibilities to Somali security forces by 31 December 2024. However, by the middle of the year the Somali government was seeking to slow the drawdown due to the deteriorating security situation, and in August the AU Peace and Security Council met to discuss a follow-up mission.<sup>243</sup> At the end of the year the UN authorized a new African-led peace operation—the AU Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM)—to continue the fight against al-Shabab.<sup>244</sup>

### *Mozambique*

In Mozambique the insurgency by Islamic State–Mozambique Province (ISMP) intensified in Cabo Delgado province in the north of the country. Since 2021 the Mozambican government's counterinsurgency efforts have been supported by Rwandan police and military forces and a multinational force, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM). SAMIM ended in July 2024, although the South African contingent of 1495 soldiers (about two-thirds of the mission) remained in Cabo Delgado until the end of the year, while Rwanda deployed 2000 more troops to the province in May 2024.<sup>245</sup>

Tensions and political violence rose sharply in parts of the country following the presidential election on 9 October.<sup>246</sup>

<sup>241</sup> United Nations, Security Council, Final report of the panel of experts pursuant to Resolution 2713 (2023) concerning al-Shabaab, S/2024/748, 28 Oct. 2024; and Cursino, M., 'Beach attack in Somali capital kills dozens', BBC, 3 Aug. 2024.

<sup>242</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), 'The Islamic State in Somalia: Responding to an evolving threat', Crisis Group Africa Briefing no. 201, 12 Sep. 2024.

<sup>243</sup> Sheikh, A., Ross, A. and Paravicini, G., 'Somalia asks peacekeepers to slow withdrawal, fears Islamist resurgence', Reuters, 20 June 2024; and Amani Africa, 'Briefing on the situation in Somalia and ATMIS', Insights on the PSC, 27 Oct. 2024.

<sup>244</sup> Ali, F., 'UN authorises new mission against al-Shabaab in Somalia', *The Guardian*, 28 Dec. 2024.

<sup>245</sup> Elias, M. and Bax, P., 'What future for military intervention in Mozambique?', International Crisis Group (ICG), 8 May 2024; and 'Rwanda: Why Rwanda is bolstering forces in northern Mozambique', All Africa, 27 May 2024.

<sup>246</sup> 'What is driving Mozambique's post-electoral protests?', International Crisis Group (ICG), 15 Nov. 2024.

## Conflicts in Central Africa and the Great Lakes

### *The Democratic Republic of the Congo*

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has consistently had the most conflict-related fatalities in Central Africa in recent years. Over 100 armed groups were estimated to be active inside the country in 2024, as well as armed forces from neighbouring Rwanda and Burundi.<sup>247</sup> Other countries in the region also contribute to two multilateral peace operations: the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in the DRC (SAMIDRC) and the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO).<sup>248</sup> The eastern provinces of Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu continued to be the epicentres of the violence, which led to a further deterioration in the security and humanitarian situation during the year.<sup>249</sup>

Political rivalries, land disputes, mineral interests and foreign intervention were the main drivers of the conflict.<sup>250</sup> The two most prominent armed groups were the 23 March Movement (Mouvement du 23 mars, M23), a primarily ethnically Tutsi rebel group with ties to the Rwandan and Ugandan governments, and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an Islamic State-affiliated militia group that also operates in Uganda. Other notable armed groups include the Wazalendo coalition of local armed groups and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, FDLR), an ethnic Hutu group. The Congolese government is using these two groups to fight against M23 and the Rwandan armed forces (Rwanda Defence Force, RDF), which are fighting alongside M23 inside the DRC. Troops from Burundi, deployed under an official bilateral agreement with the Congolese government, have been used in operations against M23 and the RDF.<sup>251</sup>

Twin political processes launched in 2022 have sought to mediate the crisis. The Nairobi Process is a regional peace initiative led by the East African Community (EAC) that focuses on negotiation efforts with multiple internal stakeholders, including armed groups, to end intra-DRC hostilities.<sup>252</sup> The Luanda Process, led by Angola, focuses on the DRC–Rwanda political dimensions, including Rwanda’s sponsoring of M23.<sup>253</sup> On 30 July 2024 the

<sup>247</sup> Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), ‘Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo’, Global Conflict Tracker, 20 June 2024.

<sup>248</sup> On the establishment of SAMIDRC in May 2023 see Cruz et al. (note 81), pp. 83–84.

<sup>249</sup> United Nations, Security Council, Final report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, S/2024/432, 4 June 2024.

<sup>250</sup> Amnesty International, ‘Why is the Democratic Republic of Congo wracked by conflict?’, 29 Oct. 2024.

<sup>251</sup> United Nations, S/2024/432 (note 249).

<sup>252</sup> For a brief description and other details of the EAC see annex B, section II, in this volume.

<sup>253</sup> Agence France-Press, ‘RDC–M23 : Accord de cessez-le feu à Luanda’ [DRC–M23: Ceasefire agreement in Luanda], *Jeune Afrique*, 24 Nov. 2022; and Hoinathy, R., ‘Eastern DRC peace processes miss the mark’, Institute for Security Studies (ISS), ISS Today, 8 Feb. 2023.

DRC and Rwanda signed a ceasefire agreement mediated by Angola.<sup>254</sup> However, the DRC–Rwanda talks broke down in December as M23 made further advances in eastern DRC.<sup>255</sup>

In accordance with the disengagement plan agreed with the Congolese government and endorsed by the UN Security Council in December 2023, MONUSCO, which was first deployed in 1999, was to begin its withdrawal from the country in 2024.<sup>256</sup> In June it concluded the withdrawal of its forces from South Kivu.<sup>257</sup> However, the mission continued to operate in North Kivu and Ituri, and in December the UN Security Council renewed its mandate for another year.<sup>258</sup>

### *Chad*

Chad continued to face the dilemma of absorbing hundreds of thousands of refugees from Sudan, while there were clashes between herders and farmers in the south and centre of the country.<sup>259</sup> In early November, Chad announced that it was considering withdrawing its troops from the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which fights Islamist militants in the Sahel, citing a lack of coordination among its partners in the force: Benin, Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria. The decision followed an attack by the Boko Haram militant group in Lac province in late October that killed at least 40 Chadian soldiers.<sup>260</sup>

Also in November Chad—the last Sahel country hosting French soldiers—announced that it was ending security cooperation with France. This prompted the start of the withdrawal of about 1000 French personnel from its three bases in Faya-Largeau in the north of the country, the eastern city of Abéché and the capital, N'Djamena.<sup>261</sup>

### *The Central African Republic*

In the Central African Republic, spillover effects from the war in Sudan included increased border insecurity, an influx of refugees, recruitment of

<sup>254</sup> Mahamba, F., 'Ceasefire agreed in eastern Congo conflict, mediator Angola says', Reuters, 30 July 2024; and United Nations, Security Council, 'Security Council press statement on Democratic Republic of Congo', Meetings coverage, SC/15866, 25 Oct. 2024.

<sup>255</sup> Kabumba, J., 'Rwanda and Congo cancel peace talks to end a conflict in eastern Congo', AP, 15 Dec. 2024.

<sup>256</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 2717, 19 Dec. 2023; and Gowan (note 97), p. 61.

<sup>257</sup> United Nations, Security Council, 'United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo', Report of the Secretary-General, S/2024/482, 20 June 2024.

<sup>258</sup> United Nations, Security Council, 'Security Council renews mandate of Stabilization Mission in Democratic Republic of Congo, unanimously adopting Resolution 2765 (2024)', Meetings coverage, SC/15949, 20 Dec. 2024.

<sup>259</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), 'Chad: Breaking the cycle of farmer–herder violence', Crisis Group Africa Briefing no. 199, 23 Aug. 2024.

<sup>260</sup> 'Chad threatens to withdraw from multinational security force', Reuters, 4 Nov. 2024.

<sup>261</sup> 'Chad to end security cooperation with France', DW, 29 Nov. 2024; and 'France hands over first base in Chad during withdrawal from former colony', Al Jazeera, 26 Dec. 2024.

armed groups to fight in Sudan and disruption to trade.<sup>262</sup> Climate-related security risks also complicated the security landscape in CAR, which remained volatile due to violent clashes among armed groups, mercenaries and bandits, particularly around mining sites and border areas.<sup>263</sup>

In July the UN Security Council relabelled its arms embargo on CAR as an arms embargo on non-state armed groups operating in the country, reflecting changes made to its coverage in 2023, and extended it until 31 July 2025.<sup>264</sup>

### *Cameroon*

The anglophone separatist conflict in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon fragmented further, and the separatist movement was further weakened by infighting and growing reliance on illicit economies. Violence against civilians continued to be perpetrated by both separatists and government forces.<sup>265</sup> In the Far North, Cameroon's poorest region, there were inter-communal frictions and violence between Choa Arab herders and Musgum fisherfolk over water resources.<sup>266</sup>

## **Conflicts in the Sahel and West Africa**

In recent years West Africa has seen military coups in Mali (2020, 2021), Guinea (2021), Burkina Faso (2022) and Niger (2023), as well as the severing of long-standing military partnerships and alliances, especially with the former colonial power France, and a pivot to Russia.<sup>267</sup> The geopolitical and security landscape of West Africa continued to be in a state of flux in 2024.

Having been suspended from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) following their military coups, in January 2024 Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger announced their withdrawal from the regional bloc.<sup>268</sup> They then began discussing plans to further integrate their own bloc, the

<sup>262</sup> United Nations, Security Council, Final report of the panel of experts on the Central African Republic extended pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2693 (2023), S/2024/444, 10 June 2024, paras 16–22.

<sup>263</sup> United Nations, Security Council, 'Central African Republic', Report of the Secretary-General, S/2024/473, 18 June 2024; and Brodtkorb, I. et al., 'Central African Republic', Climate, Peace and Security Research Paper, NUPI and SIPRI, Oct. 2024.

<sup>264</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 2745, 30 July 2024; and United Nations, 'Security Council lifts arms embargo on Central African Republic forces', UN News, 30 July 2024. On the arms embargo see also chapter 15, section III, in this volume.

<sup>265</sup> Aambo, A. A. et al., 'The evolution of Ambazonian separatist groups in anglophone Cameroon', ACLED, 10 Oct. 2024.

<sup>266</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), 'Curbing feuds over water in Cameroon's Far North', Crisis Group Africa Briefing no. 197, 25 Apr. 2024.

<sup>267</sup> On the causes of the coups see Baudais, V., *Military Entrenchment in Mali and Niger: Praetorianism in Retrospect* (SIPRI: Stockholm, Oct. 2024).

<sup>268</sup> Adekaiyaoja, A., 'ECOWAS' setbacks reflect Nigeria's waning regional influence', World Politics Review, 1 Feb. 2024. For a brief description and list of members of ECOWAS see annex B, section II, in this volume.

Alliance of Sahel States (Alliance des États du Sahel, AES), which was formed in 2023.<sup>269</sup> In July the three countries adopted a treaty transforming the AES into a confederation, including plans for the creation of a unified armed force and joint instruments for financing economic and social policies.<sup>270</sup>

Islamist armed groups have been operating across the Sahel region in recent years. In cross-border zones such as the Liptako-Gourma region, these include Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), the rival al-Qaeda-linked Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (Jama'a Nusrat al-Islam wa al-Muslimin, JNIM), as well as Ansarul Islam, Katiba Serma and Boko Haram. Islamic State–West Africa Province (ISWAP) operates in north-eastern Nigeria and the south of the Lake Chad Basin.

### *Burkina Faso*

The highest level of conflict-related deaths in the Sahel was in Burkina Faso, where alleged atrocities against civilians at the hands of both militant groups and security forces increased in 2024.<sup>271</sup> Attacks by JNIM on both civilians and government forces were some of the deadliest since it began its insurgency in 2017. For example, it reportedly killed more than 100 soldiers in an attack on an army base in the northern town of Mansila in June, while at least 200 (and possibly as many as 600) civilians were killed on 24 August in a JNIM massacre near Barsalogo in central Burkina Faso.<sup>272</sup>

A government-organized national conference in Ouagadougou in May agreed to extend military rule by five years, until July 2029.<sup>273</sup>

### *Mali*

The military rulers of Mali continued their counter-insurgency operations with the support of Russia, having dismantled the previous French and international security and stabilization architecture since coming to power

<sup>269</sup> 'Junta-led Sahel states confirm plan to form tri-state confederation—Ministry', Reuters, 15 Feb. 2024.

<sup>270</sup> 'Sommet des chefs d'Etat de l'AES : Le traité instituant la "Confédération AES" adopté' [Summit of heads of state of the AES: The treaty establishing the 'AES Confederation' adopted], LeFaso.net, 7 July 2024; and Treaty Establishing the Confederation of Sahel States, signed 6 July 2024 (in French).

<sup>271</sup> Eizenga, D., 'As security crisis deepens, Burkina Faso's junta turns to repression', World Politics Review, 30 July 2024; and Human Rights Watch (HRW), 'Burkina Faso: Army massacres 223 villagers', 25 Apr. 2024.

<sup>272</sup> Amimo, L. B., Lando, S. and Faye, M., 'Attack on army base fuels Burkina Faso mutiny rumours', BBC, 20 June 2024; United Nations, 'Guterres strongly condemns Burkina Faso terror attack; hundreds killed and injured', UN News, 27 Aug. 2024; and Vandoorne, S., Walsh, N. P. and Mezzofiore, G., 'Massacre in Burkina Faso left 600 dead, double previous estimates, according to French security assessment', CNN, 4 Oct. 2024.

<sup>273</sup> AFP, 'Burkina Faso extends military regime by five years after national consultations', France 24, 25 May 2024.

after coups in 2020 and 2021.<sup>274</sup> Armed confrontations between the parties to the conflicts in northern and central Mali continued during 2024. The government is supported by Africa Corps, which has absorbed the personnel of Wagner Group, a Russian private military and security company. The main jihadist group active in Mali is JNIM, while the Strategic Framework for the Defence of the People of Azawad (Cadre stratégique pour la défense du peuple de l'Azawad, CSP-DPA), is a coalition that was formed in 2021 in northern Mali by largely Tuareg political and military movements and which was renamed in April 2024. Atrocities continued to be committed by all sides.<sup>275</sup>

In January 2024 Mali's military junta officially terminated the 2015 Algiers Accord, a peace agreement that had been key to maintaining relative stability between the Malian government and the Tuareg separatists in northern Mali. Confrontations between government forces and the armed groups that had signed the peace agreement resumed.<sup>276</sup> In July the CSP-DPA attacked and killed numerous personnel of Africa Corps and government forces near the Algerian border. Reports suggested that Africa Corps suffered one of its heaviest losses.<sup>277</sup> JNIM carried out an assault on two highly sensitive sites—the national gendarmerie academy and the international airport—in Bamako in September, which left more than 70 people dead and over 200 injured.<sup>278</sup> Previously, the group had mainly been active in the centre and north of the country.

In keeping with the Western military drawdown in the region, the EU Training Mission Mali (EUTM Mali) ended on 17 May 2024. Deployed since 2013, the mission had included over 1000 military personnel between 2021 and 2022 from 20 European states. Numbers had significantly reduced since then against a backdrop of diplomatic tensions, and the remaining participating forces (fewer than 130 military personnel) were redeployed to Europe on 18 May 2024.<sup>279</sup> With the closure of missions in Niger, this left the EU Capacity

<sup>274</sup> Clarkson, A., 'Mali's Russian-backed security approach is a lot like France's', *World Politics Review*, 31 July 2024. On the closure of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and other developments in 2023 see Gowan (note 97), pp. 62–63; and Cruz et al. (note 81), pp. 86–87.

<sup>275</sup> Human Rights Watch (HRW), 'Mali: Army, Wagner Group atrocities against civilians', 28 Mar. 2024; and Human Rights Watch (HRW), 'Mali: Islamist armed groups, ethnic militias commit atrocities', 8 May 2024.

<sup>276</sup> 'Mali's military rulers scrap peace deal with separatist rebels', *Al Jazeera*, 26 Jan. 2024; and *Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali Resulting from the Algiers Process*, 15 May and 20 June 2015.

<sup>277</sup> Chibelushi, W., 'Russian commander killed in sandstorm ambush in Mali', *BBC*, 29 July 2024; and 'Russians pay homage to Wagner fighters killed in Mali', *Reuters*, 4 Aug. 2024.

<sup>278</sup> Jezequel, J.-H., 'The 17 September jihadist attack in Bamako: Has Mali's security strategy failed?', *International Crisis Group (ICG)*, 24 Sep. 2024.

<sup>279</sup> European External Action Service, 'End of mandate EUTM Mali', 17 May 2024.



Building Mission in Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali) as the last EU mission in the Sahel.<sup>280</sup>

### *Niger*

Niger remained heavily affected by jihadi attacks and influence in 2024, especially in the border areas.<sup>281</sup> During the year the ruling military junta continued the process of ending the country's security partnerships with several Western states and the European Union.

In December 2023 Niger had announced that it would terminate the agreement establishing the legal basis for the deployment of the two EU missions inside the country: the EU Capacity Building Mission in Niger (EUCAP Sahel Niger), launched in 2012, and the EU Military Partnership Mission in Niger (EUMPM Niger), authorized in December 2022. With that decision, EUCAP Sahel Niger became effectively redundant, while the Council of the EU formally decided in May 2024 not to extend EUMPM beyond 30 June 2024.<sup>282</sup> The withdrawal of EUCAP Sahel Niger was chaotic, with EU officials threatened and equipment seized.<sup>283</sup>

In March Niger ended its security partnership with the United States, and US forces completed their withdrawal in September.<sup>284</sup> Germany also withdrew its last soldiers from Niger, ending an eight-year mission and leaving Italy as the only remaining Western military presence in the country.<sup>285</sup>

### *Nigeria*

The largest and most powerful state in West Africa, Nigeria, continued to face multiple forms of violence.

In the North East zone, the three-decade-long fight against Boko Haram—formally known as the Group of the People of Sunnah for Dawah and Jihad (Jama'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihad, JASDJ)—continued, as did intra-jihadist fighting between Boko Haram and ISWAP, which broke away

<sup>280</sup> EUCAP Sahel Mali, 'EUCAP Sahel Mali celebrated its 10th anniversary of commitment and support to Mali', 27 Jan. 2025. On the impact of EUCAP Sahel Mali see van der Lijn, J. et al., *Assessing the Effectiveness of European Union Civilian CSDP Missions Involved in Security Sector Reform: The Cases of Afghanistan, Mali and Niger* (SIPRI: Stockholm, May 2024).

<sup>281</sup> AFP, 'In Niger, 39 villagers killed in a double attack by suspected jihadists near Burkina Faso', *Le Monde*, 15 Dec. 2024.

<sup>282</sup> 'Niger ends 2 EU security missions', *Africa News*, 5 Dec. 2023; and Council of the EU, 'EUMPM Niger: Council decides not to extend the mandate of the mission', Press release, 27 May 2024. On EUCAP Sahel Niger see Cruz et al. (note 81), pp. 91–92.

<sup>283</sup> Wilén, N., 'Procurement by proxy: How Sahelian juntas acquire equipment from ousted security partners', Egmont Policy Brief no. 338, Egmont–Royal Institute for International Relations, Mar. 2024.

<sup>284</sup> McCluskey, M. and Chen, H., 'Niger ends military agreement with US, calls it "profoundly unfair"', *CNN*, 16 Mar. 2024; and US Africa Command, 'US withdrawal from Niger completed', 16 Sep. 2024.

<sup>285</sup> 'Germany withdraws troops from junta-run Niger', *DW*, 30 Aug. 2024; and Molle, A., 'Italy's strategic role in the Sahel: Challenges and opportunities after the French withdrawal', *Start Insight*, 3 Feb. 2025.

from Boko Haram in 2016.<sup>286</sup> In addition to Nigerian armed forces, local state armed groups—commonly known as volunteer security outfits, which represent ethno-linguistic communities and major religious groups—opposed the jihadist groups in epicentres of the violence, such as Borno state.<sup>287</sup>

Similarly, in recent years banditry, kidnapping for ransom and attacks on the state and civilians by the Boko Haram factions have spread to the North West zone.<sup>288</sup> Security threats in 2024 also included secessionist groups in the south-east (Biafra), resource clashes over oil in the South-South zone and farmer–herder clashes in North West, North Central and some parts of southern Nigeria.<sup>289</sup>

## IX. Conclusions

This summary of 2024 shows that many armed conflicts escalated during the year, but some regions still experienced lower violence than in relatively recent times. The narratives of individual conflicts also underline the fact that different regions, and different countries within regions, experienced strikingly different types of conflict. However, as 2024 ended, many analysts and policymakers were not only focused on the current state of armed conflict, but on the risks of escalation.

In Europe, the Russia–Ukraine war at times threatened to escalate into a wider confrontation as part of a struggle to remake global security arrangements. In the Middle East and North Africa it was unclear what would come next, with Israel having reduced much of Gaza to ruin, degraded Iran’s regional network of non-state proxies and inadvertently set the stage for Islamist rebels to topple the Assad regime in Syria. The reshaping of the region is underway, but the outcome is far from predictable. In Asia, Myanmar’s civil war was unrelenting and numerous flashpoints in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait and on the Korean Peninsula were the focus of China’s competition with the United States and its allies for regional primacy.

<sup>286</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), ‘JAS vs. ISWAP: The war of the Boko Haram splinters’, Crisis Group Africa Briefing no. 196, 28 Mar. 2024. On the geographical deployment, organizational structure, governance and leadership of these 2 factions see Foucher, V., *Boko Haram: Mapping an Evolving Armed Constellation*, Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (UNIDIR: Geneva, 2024).

<sup>287</sup> Berman, E. G., *Exploring the Acquisition and Management of Arms among Volunteer Security Outfits in Nigeria’s Borno State* (UNIDIR, Geneva, 2024).

<sup>288</sup> Kleffmann, J. et al., *Banditry Violence in Nigeria’s North West: Insights from Affected Communities*, Managing Exits from Armed Conflict Findings Report no. 36 (UNIDIR: Geneva, 2024); Asadu, C., ‘Gunmen kidnap nearly 300 students in northwest Nigeria. 2 days later, some lose hope of finding them’, AP, 10 Mar. 2024; and Ojewale, O., ‘The bandits’ world: Recruitment strategies, command structure and motivations for mass casualty attacks in northwest Nigeria’, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2024), pp. 228–55.

<sup>289</sup> E.g. Ezeamalu, B., ‘Nigeria: Why southeast region snubs protests against Tinubu’s government’, Africa Report, 7 Aug. 2024; Amnesty International, ‘Nigeria: Government must halt Shell’s sale of its Niger Delta business unless human rights are fully protected’, 15 Apr. 2024; and Kontagora, A., ‘Nigeria’s farmer–herder conflict: A ray of hope?’, Organization for World Peace, 16 July 2024.

In the Americas gang-related violence continued in several states, with millions of Haitians in particular suffering from warlike conditions, especially in the capital. In sub-Saharan Africa, armed conflict hot spots in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes showed few signs of waning in 2024, especially the devastating wars in Ethiopia and Sudan. All this added to a global count of people dead, displaced and hungry due to armed conflict that was higher than at any time in decades.

Generalizing about what drives the disorder is misleading, given the distinct roots of each conflict. However, the international dimension remains key to many of them, with military intervention or substantial support being provided to one or more of the warring parties by outside powers. Donald Trump's return to power in the United States brings fresh uncertainty. Suggestions of a China–Russia–North Korea–Iran 'axis' are overstated, but the ties between these three countries are likely to tighten if President Trump steadily increases hostility towards them. Alternatively, there is a potential pathway to a sphere-of-influence carve-up between the USA, Russia and China, especially as the new US president may seek a grand bargain with Chinese President Xi Jinping or regional deals that seek to end the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East. However, it is unclear whether such sphere-of-influence agreements in Asia, Europe and the Middle East would bring greater or less stability to international relations and whether they would lead to reductions or increases in armed violence.

**Table 2.10.** Armed conflicts active in 2024

The armed conflicts in the table are listed by location, in alphabetical order, within each geographical region. Armed conflict involves the use of armed force between two or more states or non-state armed groups (NSAGs). It is considered 'active' if it resulted in 25 or more battle-related deaths in 2024 or 100 fatalities from 'explosions and remote violence'. The table draws on data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) project.

Location <sup>a</sup>	Type <sup>b</sup>	Internationalized <sup>c</sup>			Start year <sup>d</sup>	Intensity, 2024 <sup>e</sup>	Estimated conflict-related fatalities <sup>f</sup>	
		External actors	Multilateral peace operation	Key parties/dynamics			2024	Change, 2023–24 (%)
Americas								
Brazil	Subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v criminal gangs; inter-gang violence	. <sup>g</sup>	High	7 294	–13
Colombia	Subnational intrastate	Yes	UN, OAS	State forces v NSAGs (esp. ELN, FARC-EMC); inter-NSAG violence; inter-gang violence	1964	High	1 742	–13
Guatemala	Subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v criminal gangs; inter-gang violence	. <sup>h</sup>	Low	280	–67
Haiti	Subnational intrastate	–	UN, ad hoc	State forces v criminal gangs; inter-gang violence	. <sup>g</sup>	High	2 528	10
Honduras	Subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v criminal gangs; inter-gang violence	. <sup>g</sup>	Low	504	–22
Jamaica	Subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v criminal gangs; inter-gang violence	. <sup>g</sup>	Low	332	–20
Mexico	Subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v criminal gangs; inter-gang violence	1994	High	8 264	14
Puerto Rico (United States)	Subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v criminal gangs; inter-gang violence	. <sup>g</sup>	Low	197	–
Trinidad and Tobago	Subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v criminal gangs; inter-gang violence	. <sup>g</sup>	Low	326	–2
Venezuela	Subnational intrastate	Yes	–	State forces v Colombian NSAGs; inter-gang violence	. <sup>g</sup>	Low	537	–31

*Asia and Oceania*

Afghanistan	Subnational intrastate	Yes	UN	State forces v anti-Taliban NSAGs; post-civil war	2022	High	1 322	18
Bangladesh	Subnational intrastate	Yes	–	State forces v NSAGs; inter-NSAG violence (esp. in Rohingya refugee camps and Chittagong Hill Tracts)	2022	Low	925	175
India	Interstate border, subnational intrastate	Yes	UN	State forces v Pakistan (Kashmir, LOC); state forces v NSAGs (esp. north-east, Maoist)	1947	High	1 207	–
Indonesia	Subnational intrastate	Yes	–	States forces v NSAGs (esp. TPNPB-OPM, Islamic State, al-Qaeda)	1962	Low	156	–27
Myanmar	Civil war	Yes	–	State forces v NSAGs (ethnic armed groups); state forces v National Unity Government/Three Brotherhood Alliance	1948	Major	19 715	–7
Pakistan	Interstate border, subnational intrastate	Yes	UN	State forces v India (Kashmir, LOC); state forces v NSAGs (esp. TTP and Balochi separatists); state forces v NSAGs (cross-border air strikes)	1947	High	3 071	32
Philippines	Subnational intrastate	Yes	–	State forces v NSAGs (Moro conflict, NPA); state forces v criminal gangs ‘war on drugs’	1991	Low	647	–24
Thailand	Subnational intrastate	Yes	–	State forces v NSAG (BRN) in Deep South	2004	Low	49	–14
<i>Europe</i>								
Russia	Interstate	Yes	–	State forces v cross-border attacks by Ukraine; state forces v anti-regime NSAGs	2022	High	4 790	1 793
Ukraine	Interstate border	Yes	EU	Russia full-scale invasion Feb. 2022; Russia invasion of Crimea and Donbas 2014	2014	Major	72 850 <sup>i</sup>	102

							Estimated conflict-related fatalities <sup>f</sup>	
Location <sup>a</sup>	Type <sup>b</sup>	Internationalized <sup>c</sup>			Start year <sup>d</sup>	Intensity, 2024 <sup>e</sup>	2024	Change, 2023–24 (%)
		External actors	Multilateral peace operation	Key parties/dynamics				
<i>The Middle East and North Africa</i>								
Iran	Subnational intrastate/ Interstate	Yes	–	State forces v NSAGs (PJAK; Sistan and Baluchestan insurgency); State forces v Israel	2004	Low	364	70
Iraq	Subnational intrastate	Yes	UN, EU, NATO	Multiple and overlapping: state forces v NSAGs (esp. Iranian-backed militias, Islamic State, PKK)	2013	Low	965	–30
Israel–Palestine	Extrastate/ Interstate	Yes	UN, EU	Territorial dispute/occupation <sup>j</sup> ; Israel state forces v NSAGs (esp. Hamas, PIJ); Israel state forces v Iran	1947 <sup>k</sup>	Major	29 901	24
Lebanon	Subnational intrastate	Yes	UN	Inter-NSAG violence; sectarian tensions; Hezbollah v Israel	2020	High	3 818	1 391
Libya	Subnational intrastate	Yes	UN, EU	Limited inter-NSAG violence (since 2020 ceasefire)	2011	Low	150	67
Syria	Civil war	Yes		Multiple and overlapping: state forces v NSAGs; external state forces v NSAGs (esp. Islamic State); inter-NSAG violence	2011	High	6 888	9
Türkiye	Extrastate, subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v Kurdish NSAGs (esp. PKK)	1978	Low	55	–63
Yemen	Civil war	Yes	UN	Multiple and overlapping: Houthi forces (in the north) v internationally recognized government (backed by Saudi-led coalition), STC (in the south and east), Israel and attacks on Red Sea shipping; AQAP v other NSAGs; inter-NSAG violence	2014	High	1 814	–16

*Sub-Saharan Africa***West Africa**

Benin	Subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v NSAGs; inter-NSAG violence	2020	Low	253	11
Burkina Faso	Subnational intrastate	Yes	–	State and international forces v transnational NSAGs (esp. Ansarul Islam, Katiba Serma, ISGS, JNIM) esp. in Liptako–Gourma region; intercommunal violence	2015	High	7 526	–12
Ghana	Subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v NSAGs	2024	Low	163	–17
Mali	Subnational intrastate	Yes	EU, AU	State and international forces and Russian PMSCs v transnational NSAGs (esp. ISGS, JNIM, CSP-DPA in Liptako–Gourma region); inter-NSAG violence	2012	High	4 004	–7
Niger	Subnational intrastate	Yes	EU <sup>#</sup>	State and international forces v transnational NSAGs (esp. Boko Haram, ISWAP, Ansarul Islam, Katiba Serma, ISGS, JNIM) esp. in Liptako–Gourma region; inter-NSAG violence	2014	High	1 706	48
Nigeria	Subnational intrastate	Yes	–	State and international forces v NSAGs (esp. Boko Haram, ISWAP); farmer–herder violence; inter-NSAG violence	2009	High	9 437	8
Togo	Subnational intrastate	Yes	–	State forces v NSAG (JNIM) in Savanes region	2022	Low	128	28
<b>Central Africa</b>								
Angola	Subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v FLEC (separatist insurgency in Cabinda province)	1975	Low	112	24
Cameroon	Subnational intrastate	Yes	–	State forces v NSAGs (anglophone separatists in South West and North West regions; Boko Haram and ISWAP in Far North)	2014	High	2 228	4
Central African Republic	Subnational intrastate	Yes	UN, AU, EU	State forces, Russian PMSCs and Rwandan forces v NSAGs (esp. CPC-affiliated)	2012	Low	663	14
Chad	Subnational intrastate	Yes	–	State forces v transnational NSAGs (esp. Boko Haram and FACT); intercommunal violence	2014	Low	526	87



Location <sup>a</sup>	Type <sup>b</sup>	Internationalized <sup>c</sup>			Start year <sup>d</sup>	Intensity, 2024 <sup>e</sup>	Estimated conflict-related fatalities <sup>f</sup>	
		External actors	Multilateral peace operation	Key parties/dynamics			2024	Change, 2023–24 (%)
Congo, Democratic Republic of the	Subnational intrastate	Yes	UN, SADC	State and international (esp. Rwandan and Burundi) forces v multiple NSAGs (domestic and transnational in eastern provinces); intercommunal violence	2005	High	4 175	3
<b>East and Southern Africa</b>								
Burundi	Subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v NSAGs	2018	Low	165	–17
Ethiopia	Subnational intrastate	Yes	AU	State and Eritrean forces v NSAGs (esp. in Amhara region and OLA in Oromia region)	1973	Major	10 195	152
Kenya	Subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v NSAGs (localized ethnic-based; pastoralist militias; al-Shabab in Somalia border area)	.. <sup>l</sup>	Low	761	–25
Madagascar	Subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v criminal gangs (rural)	2012	Low	467	–9
Mozambique	Subnational intrastate	Yes	EU, SADC <sup>#</sup>	State and international forces v NSAGs (Islamist insurgency in Cabo Delgado province; resource conflicts)	2013	Low	664	118
Somalia	Subnational intrastate	Yes	UN, AU, EU	State, AU and US forces v NSAGs (esp. al-Shabab); clan-based violence	2003	High	5 445	–35
South Sudan	Subnational intrastate	Yes	UN, IGAD	State forces v NSAGs; intercommunal violence; inter-NSAG violence	2011	High	1 078	–16
Sudan	Civil war	Yes	–	State forces v NSAGs (esp. RSF)	2003	Major	15 543	–2
Uganda	Subnational intrastate	Yes	–	State, UN and DRC forces v NSAG (cross-border ADF insurgency)	1996	Low	236	–36

ACLED = Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project; NSAG = Non-state armed group; PMSC = Private military and security company. *International organizations*: AU = African Union; EAC = East African Community; EU = European Union; IGAD = Intergovernmental Authority on Development; NATO = North Atlantic Treaty Organization; OAS = Organization of American States; OSCE = Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe; SADC = Southern African Development Community; UN = United Nations. *In the Americas*: ELN = National Liberation Army (Colombia); FARC-EMC = Revolutionary Armed Forces

of Colombia–Central General Staff. *In Asia and Oceania*: BRN = Patani Malays National Revolutionary Front (Thailand); LOC = Line of Control (Kashmir); NPA = New People's Army (Philippines); TPNPB-OPM = West Papua National Liberation Army–Free Papua Movement (Indonesia); TTP = Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan. *In the Middle East and North Africa*: AQAP = Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula; PIJ = Palestinian Islamic Jihad; PJAK = Kurdistan Free Life Party (Iran); PKK = Kurdistan Workers' Party (Türkiye, Iraq); STC = Southern Transitional Council (Yemen). *In sub-Saharan Africa*: ADF = Allied Democratic Forces (Uganda and DRC); CPC = Coalition of Patriots for Change (Central African Republic); CSP-DPA = Strategic Framework for the Defence of the People of Azawad (Mali); DRC = Democratic Republic of the Congo; FACT = Front for Change and Concord in Chad; FLEC = Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (Angola); ISGS = Islamic State in the Greater Sahara; ISWAP = Islamic State–West Africa Province; JNIM = Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Togo); OLA = Oromo Liberation Army (Ethiopia); RSF = Rapid Support Forces (Sudan).

<sup>a</sup> Location refers to the state whose government is being challenged by an opposition organization, NSAG or another state or, in the cases of interstate or inter-NSAG conflict, the geographical location of the fighting.

<sup>b</sup> There are 3 main types of armed conflict: (a) interstate, (b) intrastate—including subnational intrastate and civil war—and (c) extrastate. An *interstate* (international) armed conflict involves the use of armed force by one or more states against another state or states. Interstate armed conflicts often involve border or territorial disputes. An *intrastate* (non-international) armed conflict usually involves sustained violence between a state and one or more NSAGs fighting with explicitly political goals (e.g. to take control of the state or part of its territory), but can also include armed conflict between NSAGs, sometimes with less clear goals. An intrastate armed conflict can be classified as *subnational intrastate*, typically when confined to particular areas within a sovereign state while economic and social activities in the rest of the country proceed relatively untroubled; or as a *civil war*, when it involves most of the country and results in at least 1000 conflict-related deaths in a given year. An *extrastate armed conflict* occurs between a state and a political entity that is not widely recognized as a state but has long-standing aspirations of statehood (e.g. the Israeli–Palestinian conflict).

<sup>c</sup> An armed conflict is considered *internationalized* if there is significant involvement by a foreign entity that is clearly prolonging or exacerbating the conflict. This may include an armed intervention in support of one or more of the conflict parties or the provision of significant levels of weapons or military training. The involvement may come from a foreign government or non-state actor, including private military companies, or a transnational NSAG. Multilateral *peace operations* are another form of internationalization of a conflict. <sup>#</sup> indicates that the mission closed during the year.

<sup>d</sup> This is the year when fighting caused at least 25 battle-related deaths (or 100 fatalities from 'explosions and remote violence') for the first time.

<sup>e</sup> An armed conflict is categorized as *major* if it resulted in 10 000 or more conflict-related deaths in the year; *high intensity* with 1000–9999 conflict-related deaths; or *low intensity* with 25–999 conflict-related deaths. The classification of intensity comes with the caveat that data on conflict deaths is often imprecise and tentative.

<sup>f</sup> Estimated fatality figures are collated from 4 ACLED event types: battles; explosions and remote violence; protests, riots and strategic developments; and violence against civilians. See Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), 'Armed Conflict Location & Event Data codebook', 3 Oct. 2024. If the threshold of 25 battle-related deaths or 100 fatalities from explosions and remote violence has been crossed, the fatalities from all 4 event types are added to give a total number of 'Estimated conflict-related fatalities'. Since undercounting and manipulation of fatality data are common in war, the figures are tentative estimates that indicate a trend in a conflict's form and impact. See ACLED, 'FAQs: ACLED fatality methodology', 27 Jan. 2020.

<sup>g</sup> The first year for which data on conflicts in this country is available in the ACLED database is 2018; it is not possible to verify the situation prior to that date.

<sup>h</sup> Some armed political and criminal violence continued following the 1960–66 Guatemalan Civil War. The first year for which data on conflicts in Guatemala is available in the ACLED database is 2018; it is not possible to verify the situation prior to that date.

<sup>i</sup> ACLED records fatalities in the country or territory in which the event took place. Thus, the Ukraine figure includes fatalities of Russians and North Koreans fighting in Ukraine. This may be a low estimate of fatalities given that other public sources suggest much higher casualty rates (see the discussion in section VI).

<sup>j</sup> Israel describes the conflict as being about ‘disputed territory’, while a range of authoritative bodies such as the UN Security Council, the International Court of Justice and the International Committee of the Red Cross define it as an occupation to which international humanitarian law applies.

<sup>k</sup> The latest phase of the conflict is the Israel– Hamas war that started in Oct. 2023.

<sup>l</sup> The first available year for data on conflicts in Kenya in the ACLED database is 1997; it is not possible to verify the situation prior to that date.

*Sources:* ACLED Explorer, accessed 23–27 Jan. 2025; various other sources; and author’s assessments.