escola de cultura de pau

Opportunities for peace and risk scenarios in 2016

"Opportunities for peace and risk scenarios" is an annual publication linked to the yearbook *Alert! Report on Conflicts, Human Rights and Peacebuilding*, which identifies and analyses scenarios and issues on the international agenda that may enable peacebuilding or lead to an increase in violence and instability in the short or medium term. For more information on the contexts studied, see the ECP Database on Conflict and Peacebuilding.

This report was written by:
Ana Ballesteros Peiró
Iván Navarro Milián
Josep Maria Royo Aspa
Jordi Urgell García
Pamela Urrutia Arestizábal
Ana Villellas Ariño
María Villellas Ariño

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Escola de Cultura de Pau
Plaça del Coneixement
Parc de Recerca, Edifici MRA,
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona,
08193 Bellaterra (Spain)
Tel: +34 93 586 88 42
Fax: +34 93 581 32 94
Email: pr.conflictes.escolapau@uab.cat
Website: http://escolapau.uab.cat

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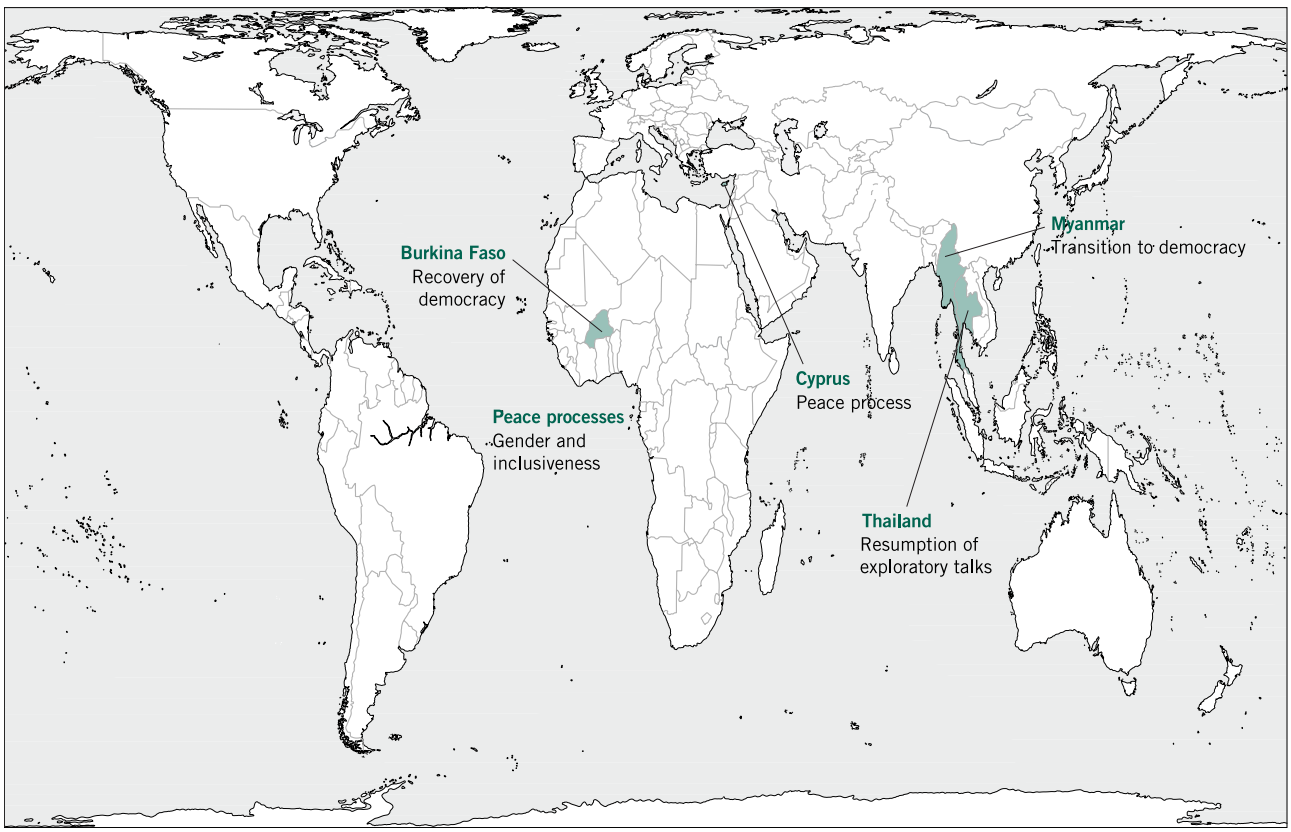
Opportunities for peace in 2016



Cyprus: The resumption of peace negotiations in 2015 and the confluence of factors linked to them (the commitment of local leaders, international support and the mobilisation of non-governmental actors from both communities of the island in favour of dialogue, as well as tangible results including but not limited to significant confidence-building measures) provide a historic window of opportunity to achieve a definitive agreement despite obstacles related to the circumstances and the background of the dispute.

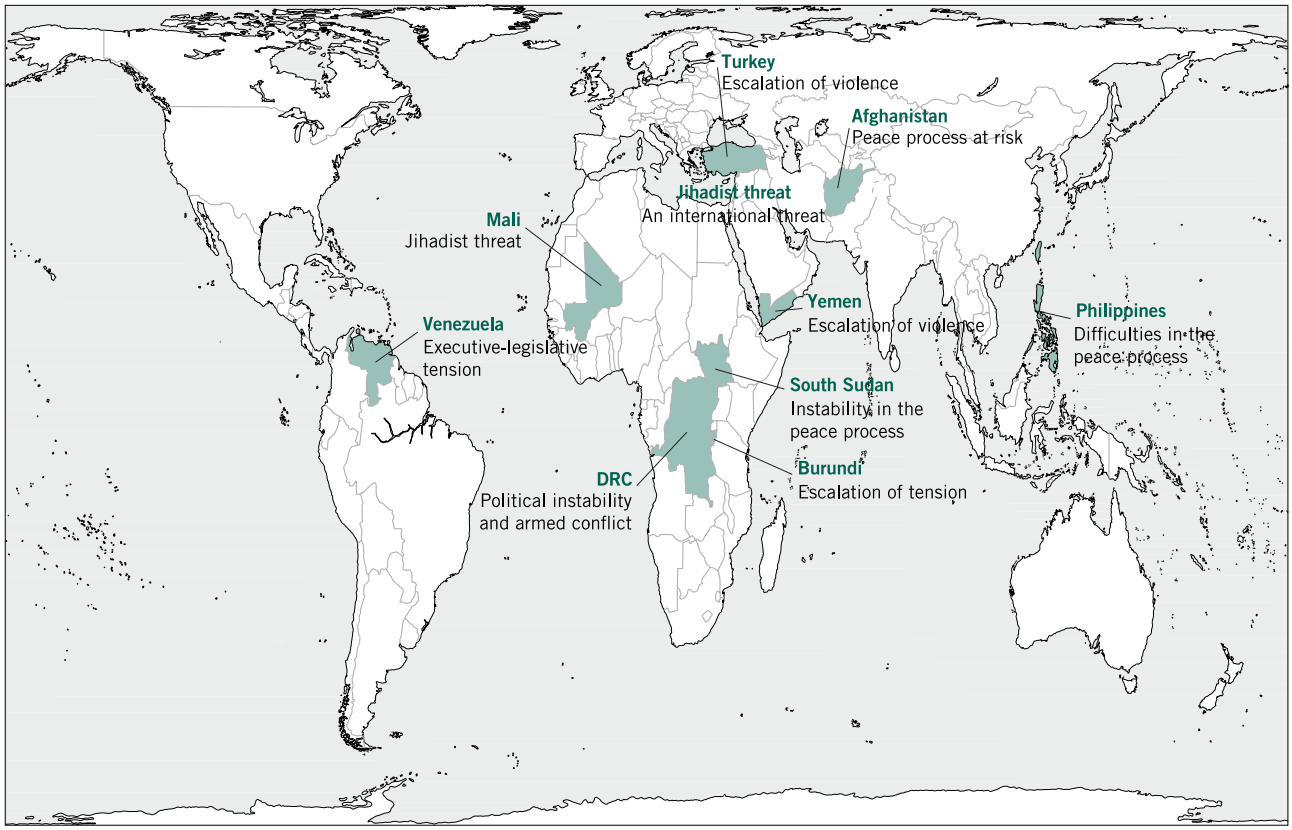
Burkina Faso: The country has put an end to the transition begun after the fall of the regime of Blaise Compaoré by holding the presidential and legislative elections that had been postponed following the failed coup d'état in September 2015. The elections returned control of the country's political institutions to the Burkinabe people after an 18-month interim government, ushering in a new period of democracy for Burkinabe society.

Myanmar: The results of the general elections, which gave an overwhelming majority to Aung San Suu Kyi's opposition party (NLD) and will lead to the formation of a new government without military guardianship, together with the ceasefire agreement signed with eight insurgent organisations, portends progress on the path to democracy and peace in the country during 2016.

Thailand: Exploratory talks were resumed in 2015 between the military junta and Mara Patani, an organisation uniting the main armed groups operating in the southern part of the country. The unification of the insurgent movement's demands and the state's recognition that dialogue is necessary to resolve the armed conflict are two mandatory conditions for building trust between the parties.

Peace processes: Recent research shows that peace processes that are inclusive and incorporate a gender and civil society perspective are more sustainable and more likely to result in the signing of a peace agreement than those that do not. Moreover, the participation of women could also help to draft agreements that address equality-related issues.

Risk scenarios in 2016



Burundi: There has been a significant deterioration of governance in the country in recent years. Growing authoritarianism and the controversial candidacy of President Pierre Nkurunziza, along with the atmosphere of political violence and human rights violations, are different aspects that reveal the seriousness of the situation and have pushed the country to the brink of armed conflict in recent months.

Mali: In June 2015, a peace agreement was achieved between the government and the Arab and Tuareg rebel movements operating in the northern region after three and a half years of armed conflict. However, the exclusion of the jihadist movements from the negotiations and the ineffectiveness of securitization measures to contain their presence pose serious obstacles to ending to the violence and may even jeopardise implementation of the peace agreements.

DRC: The upcoming cycle of new elections is causing an escalation of political violence and general instability as a consequence of the attempts of President Kabila to postpone the presidential election and thereby prolong his rule, as well as the failures of the military operation against the FDLR and the amnesty for and return of the armed group M23, which could lead to a resumption of the conflict.

South Sudan: After the signing of a peace agreement following 20 months of bloody civil war, the warring parties' lack of ownership of it, the government's unilateral decisions in matters that should be the jurisdiction of the new transitional government that has yet to be created, the repeated ceasefire violations and the emergence of new armed actors are putting the prospects for peace in the country at serious risk.

Venezuela: The opposition's resounding victory in the parliamentary elections has led to a new political scenario in the country marked by a polarisation of forces between the executive and legislative branches of government. This new political situation, which substantially modifies the power of Chavism after 15 years, may give rise to new tensions and disputes between the government and opposition forces that could further convulse national politics, expand social fragmentation and lead to outbreaks of violence.

Afghanistan: The negotiating process between the Taliban and the Afghan government hit a roadblock due to an internal crisis within the Taliban movement. The division within its leadership threatens the future of the negotiations. Despite the rising violence, Ashraf Ghani's commitment to the dialogue and to reaching out a hand to Pakistan, which is still providing sanctuary to Taliban leaders, is weakening the already brittle Afghan government. In addition, although Pakistan should participate in the agreement, its desire to control the process is pitting the parties against each other even more.

Philippines: The problems and delays experienced by Congress to approve the Bangsamoro Basic Law, a kind of statute of autonomy governing the new autonomous entity of Bangsamoro and specifying the contents of the historic peace agreement signed by the government and the MILF in 2014, caused deadlock in the peace process and raised fears of an internal split within the MILF and a resumption of violence in Mindanao.

Turkey: The conflict between Turkey and the PKK seriously worsened in 2015 due to factors such as the increasingly urban nature of the war, the "Syrianisation" of the Kurdish issue and the irruption of ISIS onto Turkish soil, the deterioration of the social atmosphere, the regression of democracy and questions about sustainable dialogue options. These dynamics could worsen in 2016 if measures to build trust and de-escalate the violence are not urgently implemented.

Yemen: Violence in the country escalated significantly in March 2015, when an international coalition led by Saudi Arabia decided to intervene to halt the advance of the Houthi militias that had ousted the government at the beginning of the year. Looking ahead to 2016, the situation threatens to worsen due to the growing complexity of the armed conflict, the severe impact of the violence on the civilian population and the obstacles to a political solution to the conflict.

Jihadist threat: ISIS has established itself as a new model for international jihadism and a competitor with al-Qaeda, demonstrating a greater ability to act around the world. Many factors may favour the increase of jihadist violence in the future, including an intensification in the struggle between ISIS and al-Qaeda, a greater incidence of armed actions by returning militiamen or "lone wolf" attacks and the possible adverse effects of the international response to ISIS.

Opportunities for peace in 2016

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The resumption of negotiations in Cyprus: the definitive peace process?

The year 2015 witnessed the resumption of formal negotiations in Cyprus to achieve a solution to the unresolved conflict dividing the island, which has been split de facto since Turkey's military invasion in 1974 in response to the overthrow of Cypriot President Makarios in a coup aimed at uniting it with Greece. In recent years, attempts at peace officiated by the UN have not yielded any positive results, such as the Annan Plan (2004), the Gambari Process (2006), the process begun in 2008 and other successive approaches. After a stagnant period lasting just over six months, the negotiations were resumed in May 2015, boosted by encouraging new factors: a local leadership fully committed to the process, clear support from the international community, a relaunch of the dialogue in an intense format aimed at achieving tangible results and progress between May and December, including significant measures of confidence, preliminary agreements on weighty issues and the mobilisation of non-governmental actors from both communities of the island. At the same time, the unresolved conflict in Cyprus has a long history of failed attempts at peace, including in the final stage of popular ratification, as both sides still have deep differences on substantive issues and its internationalised dimension puts it in a sensitive position owing to outside factors. The window of opportunity is clear, which requires sustained and fully engaged support in order to overcome obstacles and take advantage of the favourable situation.

Based on the will of local leaders, initiatives by non-governmental actors and a wide array of confidence-building measures, the resumption of negotiations in Cyprus in 2015 could produce substantial results in 2016

The periodic interruptions in the negotiations in recent years, including a breakdown between late 2012 and February 2014 due to the economic crisis on the island and the influence of the rotating presidency of the EU held by Cyprus, then another between October 2014 and May 2015, finally gave way to the formal resumption of the peace process in May. The decision of both sides and Turkey to halt unilateral exploration of hydrocarbon reserves in the Mediterranean was influential in restarting the talks. From there, in a context where the UN confirmed the presence of appropriate conditions for dialogue, the new negotiating process was launched in line with the seven-point joint statement of February 2014 (acknowledgment that the status quo is unacceptable; determination of the leaders to resume structured and results-oriented negotiations, in which all unresolved issues would be put on the negotiating table and addressed separately in order to reach an agreement as quickly as possible; the admission that resolution of the conflict in Cyprus is based on a united Cyprus, under a bicommunal and bizonal federal model with political equality and a single citizenship and international legal personality; the requirement of approval of the solution in separate but simultaneous referenda; the principle that nothing is decided until everything is decided; full powers for the negotiators and the possibility that the leaders of both communities may meet as many times as necessary; and the parties' commitment to create a positive atmosphere). Moreover, in this decision to resume the talks on a consensual basis, several factors came together to strengthen the prospects for sustainable negotiations.

First was the commitment to the process shown by both local leaders: Greek Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades and new Turkish Cypriot President Mustafa Akıncı, who was elected in the runoff of the Turkish Cypriot elections in April 2015. In his time as mayor of the Turkish part of Nicosia between 1976 and 1990, Akıncı promoted cooperative projects between both communities of the island. The will of both leaders was reflected in commitment to an intensive process and the implementation of significant measures from the beginning. The first such actions included the symbolic walk of both leaders around the old town of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot parts of Nicosia, during which they stressed their commitment to reach a solution and a shared vision for a united Cyprus. The expression and symbolism of clear will is key to the negotiating format followed in Cyprus, which is based on the political leaders and their negotiating teams. Also of note, Cyprus will hold parliamentary elections in May 2016, which could influence the political atmosphere, though Anastasiades, who was elected in February 2013, has two years left in his term and may possibly serve another. In any case, to prevent possible negative influence in the electoral campaign, President Anastasiades indicated that it would not be possible to organise a referendum on the solution only a few months prior to the election date.

Another factor strengthening the new electoral process is international support through the mediating role played by the UN and the explicit support shown by international stakeholders involved in the conflict, like Greece and Turkey, leading figures of the Green Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities and the Turkish military presence on the island. The UN Secretary-General's new special advisor on Cyprus, the Norwegian diplomat Espen Barth Eide, who was appointed in August 2014, has played a prominent role in restarting the process. Regarding the support of countries relevant to the Cypriot conflict, Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and his Greek counterpart Alexis Tsipras have been in regular telephone contact over various issues, including the conflict, and after a visit by Tsipras to Turkey in November 2015, both leaders declared that there was a window of opportunity. According to Davutoglu, there was a

common approach between Turkey and Greece to support the negotiations in Cyprus. Other international actors, like the European Union, have also shown their support for the talks to resume. As part of the process, the political leaders of Cyprus have stressed that the final agreement include the principles of the EU and the working group on EU issues will meet in the second half of the year to address the inclusion of the acquis communitaire of the island. In turn, the president of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, visited Cyprus in July as a sign of commitment to the process. The United States and the United Kingdom also expressed confidence that the process would move forward.

Furthermore, since it restarted in May, the negotiating process advanced at an intense pace, with a wide array of confidence-building measures and preliminary results. Thus, the presidential and negotiating teams met in many rounds in 2015, as did lower technical levels. As a sign of true engagement, confidence-building measures were implemented from the beginning. One such measure came during the joint meeting prior to the resumption of formal negotiations, when Anastasiades provided information on the coordinates of minefields installed by the Cypriot National Guard before 1974. Likewise, Akıncı announced the cancellation of the administrative forms required at crossing points to enter the Turkish Cypriot area. Other measures agreed in May included the commitment of cooperation to open new crossing points, practical measures to advance towards interconnecting power lines, the beginning of discussions and proposals regarding the interoperability of mobile telephones, the prevention of radio interference and the establishment of one committee on gender equality and another on culture. In turn, as part of the evolution of the discussions in the negotiating process, the parties reached an agreement in July to respect individual property rights and create a commission on property with a mandate to resolve claims under agreed criteria and with equal participation of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot members. This is a substantive issue in the process. According to the UN advisor, there will be different alternatives for regulating property rights, with various options for people dispossessed as a result of the conflict to reclaim their property. However, the difficulties around this and other issues became apparent over the course of the year, and in September the parties acknowledged that there was hard work ahead. At the same time, the continuation of the process until the end of the year and new approaches in various areas continued to point to the possibility of making progress towards a definitive solution. Thus, among other moves, the parties agreed to create a Technical Committee on Education aimed at promoting confidence-building measures in the field of education and good practices in education for peace, a measure agreed after incidents in which Greek Cypriot students attacked Turkish Cypriot vehicles in the capital in November.

International stakeholders like the UN, the EU and key regional players like Turkey and Greece have given their support to the new stage of the peace process in Cyprus

Another factor that has accompanied the process and has helped to create a social atmosphere more conducive to a negotiated solution is the mobilisation of local non-governmental actors, including religious leaders, economic players, women's organisations and people in the sports industry, among others. Though not new, this mobilisation has continued over time, increasing social support for a solution and eroding lines of division. Thus, for example, Anastasiades and Akıncı met in September with Orthodox, Armenian, Maronite and Catholic Christian religious leaders and with the Turkish Cypriot Muslim leader, the Grand Mufti. However, despite the role of women in demonstrations for peace in Cyprus, complaints persisted that the negotiations lacked a gender perspective. Thus, despite the announcement that a committee on gender equality would be created in May, there was hardly any information about its scope and activities.

In brief, on the whole there is a host of factors and conditions conducive to a negotiating process that could be decisive in achieving a negotiated solution in Cyprus. At the same time, the accumulated experience of past failures shows that the dividing issues are complex and that substantive disagreements and agreements among the negotiating elite do not always obtain support from the population later if it is not included throughout the process. As such, great effort is required for 2016 to be a decisive year in the transformation of the conflict in Cyprus.

New political era in Burkina Faso after the transitional stage ends

On 29 November 2015, Burkina Faso held its first presidential and parliamentary elections since the fall of the regime of Blaise Compaoré. The elections, which spelled the end of the transitional government, returned control of the country's political institutions to the Burkinabe people after 18 months, ushering in a new era of democracy. The elections have had great historical significance as they are the first open elections in decades, the first in 27 years in which Compaoré's name does not appear on the ballot, and especially because the new incoming president has become the first civilian elected head of state in 50 years. Altogether, this represents the start of a new period of democracy for Burkinabe society, in which the withdrawal of the Army from political life would be a central element helping to establish the new era.

The celebration of the presidential and legislative elections were the final stage in the country's transitional period after the fall of the Compaoré regime on 31 October 2014 after 37 years in power, thanks to the Burkinabe people's historic uprising against its attempt to reform the Constitution to allow the president to run for a new term. The Constitution prevented Compaoré's re-election, as it stipulated that the president of the country could only be elected to two five-year terms of office, which he had already completed. The popular revolts that led to the regime's ouster prevented passage of the constitutional reform and opened a transitional process under civilian leadership (though with the Burkinabe Army present) that appointed an interim civilian president, Michel Kafando, and planned to hold presidential and legislative elections after one year of transition, among other measures. At first the elections to end the transitional stage were planned to be held in October 2015, but a coup d'état on 16 September, the sixth in the history of the country since it won independence, dissolved the transitional government and institutions and postponed the elections. The coup was carried out by the Regiment of Presidential Security (RSP), an elite corps created by the Compaoré regime and composed of around 1,200 troops. General Gilbert Diendéré, who had been Compaoré's right hand man during his regime, seized power, jeopardising the continuity of the transition in the country. However, Burkinabe civil society, led by the civic movement Balai Citoyen, took to the streets once again to defend the transition. This popular pressure and the international community's reactions to the coup, with the UN, AU, ECOWAS, France and the United States condemning the new destabilisation of the country, among others, forced the coup leaders to give up their ambitions and hand power back to the transitional authorities. The government was restored days after the coup and immediately agreed to dissolve and disarm the RSP, arrest those responsible and set a new timetable for the elections.

Undoubtedly, this event marked the biggest threat experienced by the country in the 18-month transition period, a process that was marked by other significant hurdles, especially linked to the suspension of Compaoré's party, the Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP), and other forces and movements related to the former regime that were blocked from participating in politics and from running in the elections. The new electoral law issued by the transitional authorities prohibited members close to the deposed President Compaoré from running in the elections, thereby raising tensions in the country. In this scenario, the presidential and legislative elections are presented as the definitive end of the previous regime and the beginning of a new period in the history of the country.

Characterised by greater plurality, the new national political scenario in Burkina Faso spells the end of the one-party dominance of the state and opens a new political framework for establishing democracy

On 29 November, the Burkinabe people elected Roch Marc Christian Kaboré to be the new president with 60% turnout. The candidate of the People's Movement for Progress (MPP),[1] he won the first round with 53.49% of the votes, beating out Zéphirin Diabré, of the Union for Progress and Change (UPC), who received 29.65%. The results of the legislative elections, where 99 different political parties competed in a historic high, were much more balanced. No political party won an absolute majority,[2] which forced the formation of coalitions and pacts to rule, increasing the plurality of the political system in the country but also laying fragile bases for the new government. The elections were declared free, clean, transparent, peaceful and valid by different domestic and international observation agencies, and all participating political forces acknowledged the results. This is without a doubt a step forward in the national history of Burkina Faso, since before, during the Compaoré regime, opposition parties frequently boycotted the elections and did not recognise their results.

While it does open a new path in Burkina Faso's history, the victory of Kaboré's MPP has been questioned by some analysts about its ability to break with the previous regime due to the fact that the MPP and its candidate Kaboré come from

1. The People's Movement for Progress (MPP) party was created by Kaboré after he split from Compaoré's hegemonic party, the CDP, in January 2014, due to the attempts to reform the Constitution to make the president's re-election possible. The MPP is a centre-left party, although its ranks include many former members of the CDP.
2. Kaboré's party (MPP) obtained 55 of the 127 seats, Diabré's UPC won 33 seats, supporters of the former regime achieved 18 seats and the Sankarist party received (UNIR/PS) 5 seats.

the former ruling party, the CDP. Under Compaoré´s regime, Kaboré held the offices of prime minister, president of the National Assembly and chair of the CDP. However, the new president-elect had resigned in opposition to the attempts to reform the Constitution to change the presidential term limits, joining the opposition and the popular demonstrations that led to the fall of the regime. This history casts doubt on the MPP's ability to break with the old politics, and yet the post-election scenario, characterised by a greater plurality of national political forces that push the parties into dialogue, provides a more competitive form of politics for Burkina Faso and the end of the one-party system of domination by the state. These factors make the situation at the end of the transition conducive to breaking with remnants of the former regime.

In this new era beginning in the country, the strengthening of the civic movement will be essential to controlling the institutions and consolidating democracy, as it has amply demonstrated its capacity for coordination and mobilisation. Events like the demonstrations that precipitated the fall of Compaoré's regime and civilian resistance to the presidential guard's coup d'état, which helped to make it fail, have revealed the capacity of civil society in the country. Its members will undoubtedly continue to play a key role as guarantors of the new national politics.

On the other hand, the reform of the security sector, especially regarding the Armed Forces, whose appointed commission was already established by the interim government of Michel Kafando, is presented as crucial for definitively relegating the Army from control of the national political system. In June 2016, the appointed commission must present its proposal for reform, which may include a permanent ban on the participation of members of the military in politics, as well as proposals to strengthen mechanisms of accountability and good governance in the military. The dissolution of the presidential guard has been a great step towards national stability, although the state's ability to reposition members of it in other military corps and to prevent them from becoming a factor of instability in the country again remains to be seen.

The reform of the security sector in Burkina Faso is presented as crucial for definitively relegating the Army from control of the national political system

In this regard, it should be noted that the main risk factors to bear in mind in this new era in Burkina Faso include the arrest and subsequent legal proceedings begun against General Diendéré, the leader of the RSP, who has been charged by a military tribunal with being directly responsible for the coup d'état and with high treason, as well as sharing responsibility along with ten other people for the death of former President Thomas Sankara, cases that may undoubtedly open old wounds and bring instability to the country. Another factor that could negatively affect national stability is regional destabilisation, marked by the armed conflicts in Mali and Nigeria, and the impact that they could have on the country's borders.

Although there are some factors of risk that could destabilise the consolidation of democracy in the country, the prospects raised by the end of the transitional period, coupled with the strength of civil society that has given proof of its role as a guarantor of democracy, is generating high hopes in Burkinabe society for the new political period under way.

Exploration of scenarios of peace in southern Thailand

With the facilitation of the government of Malaysia, exploratory meetings and talks resumed in 2015 between Bangkok and the main rebel groups active in the Muslim-majority southern provinces fighting for the independence, self-determination or cultural and religious singularity of the region that was once the Sultanate of Patani. These are the first exploratory talks to take place since the collapse of the last dialogue process in late 2013 and after the coup d'état carried out by the Armed Forces in May 2014. The prospects of reaching an agreement in the short term seem highly unlikely, mainly because of the military junta's flat refusal to come to terms with the main substantive demands of the insurgent groups, the doubts expressed by the most important armed groups in the south regarding the start of negotiations with the government and the transitory nature of the current military junta, which in principle should be dissolved after the approval of a new Constitution and the holding of elections at a date still to be determined. However, despite the difficulties experienced by the talks and the scepticism voiced by some analysts about the future of the current dialogue process, there are some reasons to believe that during 2016, both parties can make substantial progress in understanding their demands, identifying aspects they share and building mutual trust. In short, pending better political circumstances, these exploratory talks could lay the groundwork for a formal negotiating process to resolve or channel the armed conflict, currently one of the most virulent in all of Southeast Asia.

One of the aspects that has generated the most optimism regarding the prospects of the current dialogue process is the fact that three conditions that had been agreed in 2014 by Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha and Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak to begin any peace process were partially or completely fulfilled in 2015: a substantial drop in violence before the start of negotiations, the inclusion of all armed groups operating in southern Thailand and the presentation of common or unified demands by the insurgent organisations. Regarding the first point, both the government and various research centres have observed a notable reduction in violence in the three Muslim-majority southern provinces in 2015. Bangkok has even indicated that it has fallen by approximately half. The reasons for this decrease are varied and surely include the improved effectiveness of the state security forces and greater collaboration with the citizenry in counterinsurgency operations, as claimed by the government, but it should not be ruled out that the leaders of the armed organisations may have decided to reduce the intensity of their armed struggle as a gesture of goodwill and a demonstration of their ability to influence the combatants on the ground. Notably, one of the main reasons for the collapse of the peace process was the inability of the armed group sitting at the negotiating table, the BRN, to demonstrate its real influence and control over the combatants on the ground and to achieve a reduction in violence during Ramadan in 2013.

The three conditions that had been agreed in 2014 by the Thai and Malaysian governments to begin any peace process were partially or completely fulfilled in 2015: a substantial drop in violence before the start of negotiations, the inclusion of all armed groups operating in southern Thailand and the presentation of common or unified demands by the insurgent organisations

Regarding the other two principles agreed by the Thai and Malaysian governments, the inclusion of all armed groups in the peace talks and the presentation of unified demands, an umbrella organisation called Mara Patani (Majilis Sura Patani, or the Patani Consultative Council) was created in 2015, which groups together six armed groups active in the southern part of the country: the BRN, GMIP, BIPP and three PULO factions. During their presentation in August, the representatives of Mara Patani declared their intention to use the dialogue and other peaceful means to achieve the end of the conflict and a solution based on recognition of the Patani people's right to self-determination. They also said that their minimum demands included formation of an autonomous region with powers over taxation, local security and natural resource management, with official recognition of the Malay language and Jawi alphabet, the application of sharia to the Muslim population and the introduction of an Islamic education system. Mara Patani also raised three preconditions for dialogue: guarantees of safety and immunity for their negotiators, recognition of Mara Patani as the legitimate representative of the six aforementioned armed organisations and official acknowledgement from the government and Parliament that the peace process forms part of the national agenda and is a state policy, regardless of the changes to government that could occur in the future. Beyond the internal cohesion of Mara Patani and the government's desire to come to terms with some of its proposals or conditions, various analysts stressed the importance of reaching this common platform among insurgent organisations with different paths, compositions and objectives after many months of discreet meetings and the decisive participation of the government of Malaysia, which has historically had influence over some of these rebel groups.

Another positive aspect noted by some analysts is the military junta's recognition on various occasions over the course of the year that the counterinsurgency strategies pursued by the state since 2004, the year when the armed conflict resumed, have been mistaken or insufficient, so the only option for ending the conflict or substantially reducing the violence was through dialogue and cooperation between the state, the rebel groups

and the civilian population. This acknowledgement of dialogue as another (though not the only) strategy for the military junta to redirect the armed conflict is even more relevant considering that previous negotiating processes, and particularly the one that took place in 2013 under the government of Yingluck Shinawatra, faced strong opposition from the Thai Armed Forces and the main security institutions in the country. Thus, the fact that the military junta is promoting a dialogue process substantially lowers the chances that a boycott by some parts of the state could weaken or shut down the peace talks. In this regard, some reports have underscored that the current government negotiating team, led by former General Aksara Kerdphol, is much more coherent and cohesive than that of the previous government. Likewise, the fact that the insurgent movement has not won a single significant concession from the state after 12 years of armed struggle caused some discouragement among certain groups while also encouraging a more pragmatic and positive view among some insurgent leaders.

Despite all these positive aspects, many reports have cast doubt on the chances of success of the current negotiating process due to the lack of political will on both sides and to the political and social circumstances in Thailand. On various occasions, Bangkok has categorically rejected the fundamental core of the insurgent movement's demands, ranging from recognition of the right to self-determination for the Patani people to the granting of autonomy or even administrative decentralisation to the Muslim-majority provinces of the south. It has also been reluctant to accept some of the procedural conditions set by Mara Patani, like its formal recognition as a partner, the inclusion of the peace process in the national agenda and the acceptance of international observers. Regarding the final point, the successive Thai governments have always considered the conflict in the south of the country as a strictly domestic affair and have been opposed to any sort of internationalised resolution to it. Indeed, media sources revealed that the government is even afraid that by posing as a coordinating body of insurgent groups, Mara Patani may attain an international visibility and importance that Bangkok regrets. Thus, according to some analysts, the current government is a prisoner of its own nationalism and unitary and homogeneous view of the country, and therefore cannot offer anything that could be attractive to the insurgent groups. According to these analysts, Bangkok is trying to lure the rebel movement to the negotiating table in order to achieve a reduction or elimination of the violence (hence its insistence on agreeing on safety zones or violence-free zones with the armed groups) or achieve its submission or demobilisation with hardly no political cost.

From the insurgency's point of view, the main obstacle to the current process is the seeming lack of clarity on the position of the southern armed group BRN concerning the peace process. Officially it forms part of Mara Patani (in fact, the president of Mara Patani is also a member of the BRN), but shortly after the public presentation of this unitary platform, several BRN representatives released a statement harshly criticising the government for a lack of political will and clearly stating that they would not participate in the negotiations. According to some sources, an important core of the BRN's leadership is wary of the current peace process and supports resuming negotiations with an elected government that is not subject to the current interim military junta and is not opposed as clearly as the current government to some forms of autonomy or decentralisation. Whatever the case may be, it is not clear whether the conflicting statements concerning the peace process issued by different members of the BRN reflects some internal factionalism within the group or is BRN's strategy to maintain control of Mara Patani while putting pressure on the military junta. Regardless, it appears beyond doubt that the BRN's position will end up being decisive for the future of the region, as it is the groups responsible for the vast majority of the acts of violence committed by the insurgency. According to some sources, the rest of the Mara Patani groups have little influence over the violence in the provinces of Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat and are participating in the negotiations to try to win certain concessions.

In short, the difficulties facing the dialogue process are so considerable that a peace agreement (or even a rapprochement of positions regarding its contents) is unlikely in the short term. However, on several occasions both the government and Mara Patani have declared their commitment to the negotiating process and the meetings were never interrupted at any point during the year, even during major acts of violence. The many discreet meetings that took place in 2015 resulted at the end of the year in a government proposal to form a joint working group with the participation of civil society organisations to address the subjects of security, development and justice simultaneously. Given the social and political polarisation that Thailand has experienced since the start of the 21st century and the intensity of the armed conflict since 2004, any attempt at dialogue should be seen as a positive aspect in the resolution of an armed conflict that seems unlikely to be solved through military means.

The transition to democracy and peace in Myanmar

Since 2011, Myanmar has set out on a path of political transformation and transition towards democracy following the dissolution of the military junta and the formation of a civilian government, with the country undergoing important changes. Although there are many challenges ahead in terms of respect for human rights, security and democracy, 2015 has been a year of crucial events for deepening this transition, especially after general elections were held in November and a ceasefire agreement was signed with different rebel groups in October.

The elections gave an overwhelming majority to the main opposition party, the NLD led by Aung San Suu Kyi. The NLD received 79% of the seats in contention in elections where the incidents were minor in nature, considering conditions in the country. Even with 25% of the seats reserved for the military, the NLD maintains a majority, which will allow it to legislate. It may also designate two of the three presidential candidates and elect the future president of the country. The result was accepted by the current government without hesitation and points the way to a great opportunity for establishing democracy in the country in the near future, though not without risks or uncertainties in a context fraught with political and security problems.[3] The elections were considered credible by observers and although some incidents were reported, they were generally described as fair and transparent.

The government finally resulting from these elections, which will be formed in March, is the first elected through the polls and created without direct or indirect military guardianship in the past five decades. NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who cannot serve as president of the country because the Constitution prevents anyone with foreign children from holding the office, has invited the chief of the Armed Forces, the current president and the speaker of Parliament to begin talks about a future national reconciliation government. The ability of the NLD, and particularly its leader, to manager relations with representatives of the former regime will be key to the possible success of the transition, given that the military retains significant amounts of power in the country. In addition to the seats directly reserved for the military, a constitutional provision assigns management of the Ministries of Defence, the Interior and Border Affairs to the Army, which are key portfolios in a country like Myanmar. Therefore, the ability to conduct a constructive dialogue will largely depend on the possibility that the NLD may consolidate its power and ensure the sustainability of the transition and of the political and institutional changes that may take place. Constitutional reform will remain one of the central themes of political debate in the country, as the NLD gives it maximum priority. The Burmese Army currently has effective veto power over any reform, so any step that may be taken in this direction must necessarily be agreed by the military. The negotiations will undoubtedly be complex and striking the right balance between transformation and sustainability will require great negotiating skill. The NLD should try to stress the legitimacy given to it by the polls, but weakening the power of the hitherto almost omnipotent military establishment will not be an easy task. Without a profound transformation of the Burmese Armed Forces, it will be difficult to establish democracy in Myanmar.

The elections have demonstrated the high levels of popular support enjoyed by the NLD and the majority's rejection of the current government. Therefore, the NLD has enormous legitimacy to take political action. However, the expectations that have been created around its victory and its ability to transform the political and social situation in the country may lead to enormous frustration, since the towering constraints can hardly be overcome in a short period of time. Therefore, the NLD will have to manage these expectations so its massive support does not lead to widespread social discontent that threatens its government action. Furthermore, management of the tension surrounding the situation of the Rohingya population will be another key issue that it will have to address and a litmus test for the quality of democracy in the country.

In 2015, Aung San Suu Kyi won a victory at the polls in Myanmar and a ceasefire agreement was signed with eight insurgent groups

In addition to the elections and the political process, a ceasefire agreement was signed in October between the government and eight armed ethnic insurgent groups, the KNU, KNLA-PC, DKBA, Pa-O NLO, CNF, ALP, ABSDF and RCS/SSA. The process to achieve an end to the armed conflict in Myanmar had begun in 2011 with the signing of bilateral ceasefire agreements between the government and 14 armed groups from 2011 to 2013. The agreement reached in 2015 was the result of a long negotiating process that had included 15 armed groups, although seven did not sign it in the end. As some have noted, while the agreement is far from optimal, it paves the way for a broader political agreement.[4] The negotiating process and the signed ceasefire agreement have served to strengthen the peace agenda in the country, giving greater visibility and legitimacy to ethnic actors and breaking some taboos, such as the territorial organisation of the country

3. International Crisis Group, *The Myanmar Elections: Results and Implications*, Asia Briefing no. 147, 9 December 2015; Transnational Institute, "The 2015 General Election: A New Beginning?" *Transnational Institute,* 4 December 2015.
4. International Crisis Group, *Myanmar's Peace Process: A Nationwide Ceasefire Remains Elusive,* Asia Briefing no. 146, 16 September 2015; Horsey, Richard, "The Importance of the Myanmar Peace Deal", In Pursuit of Peace, International Crisis Group, 16 October 2015.

and recognition of its minorities. The fact that it was signed before the elections were held was a major achievement. Risks would have grown otherwise, because the formation of the new government resulting from the elections would cause delays in its ratification and boost the risk of a change in the direct dialogue. In fact, the text of the agreement was accepted by all the groups participating in the elections, even those that finally did not sign it, as the only issue where agreement had not been reached was over which groups could sign it. Another point that has been identified as a great hurdle in this process is its national and internal nature, since at least publicly, international presence and support has been minimal.

So while the agreement is extremely important because it opens the door to a subsequent agreement to end the armed conflict in the country, many risks flow from the process. For example, even though the ceasefire agreement has been described as "nationwide", many rebel groups have been excluded from it, since the government refused to allow groups with which it had not reached a previous bilateral ceasefire accord to sign the joint agreement. Especially significant is the fact that the UWSA, SSA and KIA, groups that control vast territories and possess many weapons, were left out of the agreement. The armed clashes have persisted in recent months and clashes have been reported between the Burmese Armed Forces and especially the KIA, SSA-N, TNLA, MNDAA and AA. The civilian population continued to be forcibly displaced as a result of the clashes, highlighting the difficult security conditions that much of the population experiences in areas affected by the violence and the serious impact that it is continuing to have on daily life.

In addition to the evident risks stemming from the persisting violence, there are others of a political nature, mainly the change that will occur in the government negotiating team as a result of the elections. Although an NLD representative attended the agreement ceremony, the party was not represented at the highest level and did not sign it, claiming that the exclusion of different insurgent organisations undermined its "nationwide" scope and made it partial, helping to create misunderstandings between the groups that signed it and those that did not. The coming months will be decisive for the future of the political negotiations with the insurgency and also for the possibility that more armed groups will join the ceasefire agreement. Meanwhile, the insurgent coordinating body UNFC, which unites 11 armed groups, has announced the formation of a committee to start talks with the NLD.[5]

Myanmar is going through a crucial period for the future of the country. The many challenges in terms of democratisation and security are pressing and require prudent analysis unswayed by triumphalism. On the one hand, the Burmese Army, the greatest exponent of the former regime, wields enormous power and has a great ability to control the political institutions of the country, which is a major burden for any democratisation process. On the other hand, armed violence persists with some intensity and many groups, some with important military capacity, have been excluded from the ceasefire agreement. However, since the transition in the country began in 2011, reforms have gradually been established. An especially clear demonstration of this is the fact that the election results were accepted by the sitting Burmese government. If the progress achieved in recent years is consolidated in 2016, backsliding in Myanmar will move towards the horizon.

5. Radio Free Asia, "Myanmar Chief Negotiator Briefed Aung San Suu Kyi on Peace Process: NLD", Radio Free Asia, 9 December 2015.

The gender perspective in peace processes: inclusiveness and sustainability

Peace processes are extremely important opportunities for transforming armed conflicts, overcoming violence and building peaceful and fair societies. In recent years, the role of civil society in peacebuilding in societies affected by armed violence and conflict has become a subject of great and growing importance for peace research. More specifically, one of the central questions revolves around the role that civil society should play in peace processes and how its participation should be organised. Alongside more classic views sustaining that the peace negotiations should give priority to the presence of the actors engaged in the armed conflict for the purpose of achieving peace agreements that effectively end the direct violence and clashes, other perspectives point to the importance of creating inclusive processes that would lead to greater sustainability of the agreements potentially reached.

Agreements reached in more inclusive peace processes are more sustainable

Parallel to this debate, the adoption in 2000 of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security and the subsequent establishment of the women, peace and security agenda also demonstrated how important it is that peace processes are inclusive from a gender perspective and do not reproduce dynamics of inequality that relegate women away from the public sphere. Traditionally, peace processes have been profoundly patriarchal and excluded women, in line with the dynamics that have prevailed in armed conflict. Since the players at the negotiating table are usually those who have fought on the battlefield—or more specifically, the elite of such groups—and given that they are heavily male-dominated, women have had little opportunity to participate in negotiating for peace.

The research available on women's participation in peace negotiations indicates that the presence of women is very low, despite an increase observed in recent years. In 2012, the United Nations indicated that in a sample of 31 peace processes between 1992 and 2012, only 2% of the main mediators, 4% of the witnesses and signatories and 9% of the negotiators were women.[6] The UN Secretary-General's report on women, peace and security in 2015 echoes some partial progress, indicating that there was at least one woman in all the UN mediating teams for the 12 peace processes the organisation supports and in nine of them the women held senior positions, which represents an increase over previous years. Moreover, all these processes included mechanisms for consulting with civil society and women's organisations were consulted in 88% of them. Despite the progress, these figures still reveal some very specific aspects of the peace process and do not allow a thorough assessment of women's ability to influence.

Trying to go beyond the purely quantitative aspects of the presence of women in peace processes or other actors that have also been traditionally excluded, some recent research has tried to evaluate the impact of this presence in more qualitative terms. Different studies have tried to answer the question of whether more inclusive peace processes get better results, especially in terms of sustainability, than those that are not. Although this is an emerging field of research that requires further development, the first findings suggest that in addition to the parties to the conflict, the presence of other actors boosts the sustainability of peace processes, especially when coming from civil society. A study conducted by the University of Uppsala concluded that in cases in which a peace process has been reached and where civil society participated in some way, this presence has a positive impact on the sustainability of the peace processes, increasing it.[7] From a sample of 83 agreements signed after the Cold War, the author concludes that the possibilities of failure of signed agreements reached with the participation of civil society drops by 64%, compared to 50% in all cases.

Other authors have focused specifically on the impact of the presence of women and after analysing 48 cases of peace negotiations and political transitions, they conclude that when groups of women had a substantive ability to influence the results, the odds increased that an agreement was reached and there was no case in which this presence had a negative impact.[8] Only in one case with a significant presence of women was an agreement not signed, compared to six cases without the presence of women in which agreements were not reached. In addition, according to this study, the presence of women's groups was crucial to promoting the signing of agreements and overcoming moments of deadlock and also increased the chances that the agreements achieved were implemented.

Therefore, these studies show that the inclusion of civil society, and especially women's groups, has positive effects on the possibilities of reaching peace agreements and their sustainability, without this presence leading to any negative effects that could hinder the signing of the accords. Thus,

6. UN Women, *UN Women Sourcebook on Women, Peace and Security,* UN Women, 2012.
7. Desirée Nilsson, "Anchoring the Peace: Civil Society Actors in Peace Accords and Durable Peace", *International Interactions,* 38(2), pp. 243–266, 2012.
8. Marie O'Reilly, Andrea Ó Súilleabháin and Thania Paffenholz, *Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes,* International Peace Institute, June 2015.

the arguments traditionally used to justify the exclusion of civil society and women's organisations, claiming that their presence undermine the efficiency and effectiveness of peace negotiations, are demonstrated to be wrong.

In conclusion, based on the observation that women have traditionally been excluded from negotiations, studies have tried to show how their inclusion is an issue of social justice as well as a way to make peacebuilding forces more sustainable and effective. Recent research reveals that processes upholding the principle of inclusiveness for civil society stakeholders in general and women in particular have concrete positive effects on sustainability. Therefore, this trend must be strengthened in order to make progress in implementing processes that help to build a sustainable and inclusive peace.

Risk scenarios in 2016

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On the brink of civil war in Burundi

A significant deterioration in governance in Burundi has taken place in recent years. Signs of the gravity of the situation include the growing authoritarianism of President Pierre Nkurunziza, revealed during the political crisis stemming from the 2010 elections, the increasing institutional deterioration and the shrinking of the public space available to the opposition, Nkurunziza's controversial candidacy for a third term, his victory in a presidential election lacking all credibility, the escalation of political violence and failed coup attempt in May, human rights violations and pressure on the opposition media.

The transition process that began with the signing of the Arusha Accords in 2000, aimed at ending the armed conflict that started in 1993 and the ethno-political violence that had affected the country since independence in 1962, formally ended in 2005 with the approval of a new Constitution that formalised the sharing of political and military power between the two main communities, the Hutus and Tutsis, and the elections that led to the formation of a new government led by Pierre Nkurunziza. Meanwhile, it was not until December 2008 that the last armed group, the FNL of Agathon Rwasa, signed a definitive agreement that opened the door to its participation in the elections in 2010. However, by 2005 relations between the authorities and the opposition had already become difficult and there were also divisions within the ruling party (CNDD-FDD), including the expulsion and subsequent imprisonment of its chair, Hussein Radjabu, accused by Nkurunziza's government of organising a new armed group. The growing authoritarianism and social polarisation was reflected in the elections in 2010, marked by an atmosphere of violence and the opposition's complaints about pressure and acts of intimidation that it blamed mainly on the CNDD-FDD and the government itself, though also on the new party FNL to a lesser extent. The CNDD-FDD triumphed in the communal elections in May amidst accusations of fraud from the opposition. Based on this situation, the opposition boycotted the presidential election, which was accompanied by an escalation of violence that continued after it had ended, including attacks, cases of torture and detentions of activists, explosions, arson against offices and demonstrations by youth groups, especially the youth wing of the CNDD-FDD, the Imbonerakure, among other issues. The institutions remained under the control of the CNDD-FDD, which stepped up pressure on the opposition and shrank the public space, while corruption grew.

Until 2014, the guarantors of the Arusha Accords were complacent with the regime despite growing corruption and authoritarianism in Burundi

This development towards authoritarianism after the 2010 elections triggered opposition protests that led to an action-reaction loop between the CNDD-FDD, the government and the opposition in the climate of a permanent pre-electoral campaign prior to the elections in 2015. The harsh repression of the opposition in 2014 and the beginning of 2015 included the arrest and trial of opposition leaders,[9] threats against journalists (100 exiled, almost the whole sector) and human rights advocates (trial and subsequent release of famous local human rights activist Pierre-Claver Mbonimpa due to international pressure) and government strategies to divide the opposition by promoting factions within the political parties, among other issues. This situation worsened because of the calculated ambiguity with which President Nkurunziza and the CNDD-FDD raised the possibility of him running for a third term. The Arusha Accords of 2000 set a two-term limit by direct universal suffrage (Article 96 of the Constitution), but faced with the possibility of him forcing his candidacy for a third term, in January 2015 over 300 civil society organisations launched a campaign called *Halte au troisième mandat* ("No to a third term"), in line with the Arusha Accords and the Constitution. He announced his candidacy in April 2015 and it was ratified by the Constitutional Court in May. Nkurunziza argued that his first term after the transition should not count because he was selected by the upper and lower chambers, as admitted exceptionally in Article 302 of the Constitution to accommodate the outgoing president of the transition in 2005. Even leaders of his own party and the Council of Elders of the CNDD-FDD (executive body) were opposed to his candidacy, which led to some of them being expelled. His candidacy set off widespread demonstrations in April and May in an atmosphere of political violence that killed around 240 people between April and November, according to the UNHCR, and more than 210,000 people fled the country. Despite the social protests, the legislative and communal elections were held on 29 June. They were won by the CNDD-FDD in a climate of fear and boycotted by the opposition. Later, the presidential election took place on 21 July, which the opposition boycotted again. The election was criticized unanimously, including by the local Catholic Church, and described as not credible by the international community due to the atmosphere of violence, intimidation, restrictions on the media and lack of legitimacy of Nkurunziza's third term.

There is some division within the security forces on how to deal with the situation, as indicated by analysts such as the International Crisis Group, alongside the emergence of

9. Prominent cases include the leader of the ADC Ikibiri, Léonce Ngendakumana, tried and sentenced to a year in prison for "damaging accusations, slanderous denunciations and ethnic aversion"; the leader of the MSD, Alexis Sinduhije, who fled to Belgium, and hundreds of his detained MSD supporters; the historical leader of the CNDD, Léonard Nyangoma, in exile; and the former chair of the ruling CNDD-FDD, Hussein Radjabu, who escaped from prison with the alleged support of his gaolers and went into exile.

pockets of insurgency. Although much of the Burundian Army remained neutral, the attempted coup d'état in May demonstrated this division and the seriousness of the situation. On 13 May, the former chief of the secret service, General Godefroid Niyombare, announced the dismissal of President Pierre Nkurunziza while he was in Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) attending a meeting of the East African Community (EAC). Niyombare had been dismissed in February 2015 after advising Nkurunziza against running for a third term. The government managed to foil the attempted coup since the Burundian special forces and the Imbonerakure remained loyal to Nkurunziza, triggering heavy fighting in the capital. The three generals who led the coup later surrendered to the authorities. Furthermore, the police and the military have taken different approaches to the social demonstrations. While the police, secret services (SNR), Imbonerakure militias and opposition groups and militias –to a lesser extent– have used excessive force and stand accused of committing many extrajudicial executions, the Burundian Army has remained neutral. Former armed groups have become integrated into it and parallel chains of command have been confirmed there, so loyalties linked to the former insurgencies could be reactivated. The first major action in this regard took place in December 2014 with the execution of around 100 combatants coming from the DRC in the Kibira forest, in Cibitoke, some of whom had already been disarmed. Some militias proliferated later during 2015 and there were various clashes, like in July when the Burundian Army announced the death of 15 rebels and the capture of another 170 in different battles in the north. In October, MONUSCO confirmed that the Burundian Army was present in the Congolese province of South Kivu in pursuit of FNL groups, which led to several firefights. The deaths of senior government and opposition leaders like General Adolphe Nshimirimana, the chief of the security services and a close ally of Nkurunziza; the former chief of staff under Pierre Buyoya (1993-2006), Colonel Jean Bikomagu; and politicians such as Pontien Barutwanayo (FNL), Patrice Gahungu and Zedi Feruzi (UPD), among others, as well as the attempted assassination of the chief of the Armed Forces, General Prime Niyongabo, and of activist Pierre-Claver Mbonimpa, whose son was murdered, reveal the gravity of the situation.

Furthermore, the international community has reacted slowly and has been unable to curb the crisis. Overall, until 2014 the guarantor countries and organisations of the Arusha Accords were complacent with the regime despite the growing corruption and authoritarianism. In 2014, the EU increased official development assistance (ODA) to Burundi and the UN Security Council closed the political mission there, the BNUB, on 31 December, supposedly because the country had made important progress towards peace. The president's announcement in April 2015, the serious protests resulting from it and the attempted coup d'état in May raised alarms in African and European foreign ministries. Thereafter, all the various initiatives undertaken, including pressure from EU countries and even the freezing of funds for holding the elections and the attempted mediation of the EAC and the International Conference for the Great Lakes Region (ICGRL), led by Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, only served to postpone the date of the elections and have failed to improve the conditions in which they would be held and to strike up any dialogue. The pressure exerted by the EAC and the AU was weakened by leaders in neighbouring countries who have followed strategies very similar to Nkurunziza to remain in power, like Yoweri Museveni, Robert Mugabe and Paul Kagame, among others. His re-election led to the freezing of the bilateral ODA, pressure on the EAC to do the same since 70% of the funding for the EAC comes from the West, and deterioration in relations with Belgium and Rwanda. The United States and the EU decided to establish sanctions against some of those responsible, and in November the UN Security Council condemned the rise in violence and indicated its intention to consider additional measures, although Russia, China and several African countries blocked the imposition of sanctions. In conclusion, the different elements show that in the near future only more determined pressure on the parties to force dialogue between the government and the opposition, monitoring of the situation and the establishment of sanctions to curb the incitement to violence by neighbouring countries, regional organisations and the international community can prevent the country from backsliding to the climate of violence that it was believed to have overcome.

Mali: jihadist group activities threaten stability

In June 2015, Mali achieved the signing of the Algiers Accord between the main Arab and Tuareg rebel groups operating in the north: the Coordination of Movements of Azawad (CMA), which unites the groups fighting for the independence of the region of Azawad, and the Platform, which coordinates the Arab and Tuareg movements that support national unity.[10] Reached with Algerian mediation, the peace agreement heralded a new scenario for peacebuilding in the north of the country after three and a half years of armed conflict and ended the fourth Tuareg uprising against the state of Mali since national independence was obtained in 1960.[11] Each of these armed uprisings ended with the signing of different peace agreements[12] that tried to respond to northern demands, focusing mainly on the distribution of political power, acknowledgement of their identity and development. The Algiers Accord of June 2015 used old agreements as a basis for resolving the historical dynamics of the north's grievances against the Malian government in order to move forward in national reconciliation and reconstruction.

However, the signing of the peace agreement raised important questions about the real possibilities of obtaining the commitments acquired to resolve the north's historical demands and put an end to the periodic escalations of violence due to the mistrust generated by systematic violations of the previous peace agreements and deals. Uncertainty about the background and especially the ability of this Algiers Accord to lead to an end to the violence in the country has been great from the beginning due to the exclusion of jihadist armed groups from the negotiations. Groups like al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), previously known as the Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC); the organisation Ansar Dine (defenders of the faith), led by historic Tuareg leader Iyad Ag Ghaly; the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO); the group led by the Algerian Mokhtar Belmokhtar known as al-Mourabitoun; and the recently emerged, self-proclaimed Macina Liberation Front (MLF), led by Hamadoun Kouffa, were excluded from the peace process negotiating table, as Bamako took a strictly military approach to dealing with them.

These armed movements have remained active in the country and pose a great risk to stability and peace in Mali. Even though the French-led international Operation Serval in January 2013 momentarily managed to contain the spread of jihadism in the country, which had taken control of the north and threatened to size the capital, these groups and their capacity for articulation and destabilisation remain. The jihadist movements have been stepping up attacks and actions since peace was signed with the secular movements, aimed primarily at international forces as well as foreign interests. Some of these movements' most notorious attacks, like the one on the Byblos Hotel in Sévaré (7 August) claimed by the MLF and another on the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako (20 November), which was claimed by both the al-Mourabitoun in collaboration with AQIM and by the MLF in cooperation with Ansar Dine, reveal the capacity for destabilisation that these groups still possess. One of the current features of jihadism in the country, which was seen in the attack on the Radisson Blu, in which up to four jihadist groups claimed involvement, is related to its ability to form alliances, which presents a new scenario bringing a greater potential for destabilisation. In speech captured on audio, the leader of AQIM, Abu Musab Abdul Wadub, confirmed that al-Mourabitoun had joined his group and claimed responsibility for the attack on the hotel as a symbol of their unity. The assault, which involved the kidnapping of around 170 people for hours and claimed the lives of 22, showed the jihadist organisations' growing offensive abilities by capturing what was supposedly one of the most secure centres in the country while also exposing the vulnerability of the Malian government before the jihadist menace, which decreed a 10-day national state of emergency.

One of the current features of jihadism in Mali, which was seen in the attack on the Radisson Blu, is related to its ability to form alliances among different organisations

These actions have revealed the national security forces' inability to respond to jihadism and raise doubts about the effectiveness of the securitisation initiatives carried out in the region. Both programmes to train national security forces implemented by the United States and the European mission EUTM and French combat operations in the area (first under the umbrella of Operation Serval and then under Operation Barkhane) have been ineffective in substantially containing, much less eliminating, the jihadist threat to the country. Contrary to what might be expected, the presence, areas of operation and capacity of radical movements in the country

10. Armed movements belonging to the CMA include: the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), the High Council for the Unity of Azawad (HCUA) and the Arab Movement of Azawad (MAA). Movements belonging to the Platform: the Imghad and Allies Tuareg Self-Defence Group GATIA), the Coordination of Movements and Fronts of Patriotic Resistance (CMFPR) formed by the "Ganda Koy" and "Ganda Iso" Songhai militias, the Coalition for the People of Azawad (CPA) and the National Front for the Liberation of Azawad (FNLA).
11. The four Tuareg revolts against the state took place in 1963-1964, 1990-1996, 2006-2009 and 2012-2015.
12. The different peace agreements signed between the government of Mali and the Arab and Tuareg rebel movements behind the various insurrections include the 1991 Tamanrasset Accord, 1992 National Pact, 1996 Timbuktu Accord, 2006 Algiers Agreement, 2009 Sebha Agreement (Libya) and 2015 Algiers Accord.

have intensified. The United Nations mission in the country, MINUSMA, which has 11,240 assigned by the Security Council under a mandate based on protecting the population and not on combating terrorism, has become the jihadists' main target, making it the UN mission with the highest number of casualties.

While the actions of jihadist groups had previously been concentrated in the northern regions of Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu, taking advantage of the context of war between Arab and Tuareg movements and the Malian government, this scenario has changed substantially with the signing of the peace agreement in the north, which forced the radical movements to diversify their methods and fields of action, moving from their traditional areas of operation, in the north, to regions in the centre and south of the country. The scenario of constant clashes and ceasefire violations perpetrated by the armed groups that signed the Algiers Accord (the Coordination and the Platform) provided the jihadists with fertile ground for pursuing their armed activities. This context persisted when the peace agreement was signed, reporting its worst incident in August, when members of the CMA and the pro-government GATIA militias (Platform) fought for days for control of the city of Anéfis, north of the region of Kidal. Since then, a new scenario of stability has emerged between the rival Tuareg factions that damages the Islamist movements.

Following the clashes in Anéfis, which caused the first major crisis in the peace process, direct negotiations were begun between the CMA (Ifogha Tuareg group) and the Platform (Inghad Tuareg group), achieving a cessation of hostilities agreement between them in mid-October and ratifying the commitment to peace. The CMA and the Platform agreed to set up mixed patrols in the regions of Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu to monitor peacekeeping, which has led to clashes between them and jihadist groups. The Anéfis agreement was harshly criticised by some jihadist movements, especially by Ansar Dine, led by the Tuareg Iyad ag Ghaly, who accused the secular movements of betraying the people of Azawad. Some analysts pointed out that the attack on the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako could be interpreted as a response to the Anéfis agreement in an attempt to destabilise the peace process.

Furthermore, it is worth noting the impact that the current global context may have on Mali, characterised by the prominence of the actions of Islamic State (ISIS) and its competition with al-Qaeda on the international scene, although it is still unclear if ISIS is present in the country. The spectacular media coverage of the actions of ISIS and the impact that it is having worldwide, acquiring affiliations from armed movements in different regions, is creating a situation of competition between ISIS and the al-Qaeda network to be the leading jihadist organisation.[13] In Mali and in the Sahel region in general, this scenario is leading to a rise in the armed actions of groups linked to al-Qaeda, increasingly charged with greater media impact, to block the possible influence of ISIS. In 2015, the Nigerian armed group Boko Haram pledged allegiance to the network led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. In this context, al-Qaeda-linked groups like AQIM and Ansar Dine are trying to revive their military actions and notoriety to avoid becoming eclipsed. This seems to indicate that this type of media violence, aimed at attaining front-page coverage and destabilising the country, will continue to be present in 2016.

Both programmes to train national security forces implemented by the United States and the European mission EUTM and French combat operations have been ineffective in containing the jihadist threat in Mali

Characterised by the exclusion of jihadist movements from the negotiations, the ineffectiveness of securitization measures to contain them and the global context of the struggle for prominence between the al-Qaeda and ISIS networks, these different scenarios present serious hurdles to achieving an end to the violence in Mali and may even pose severe risks to effectively implementing the peace agreements in the north.

13. See "The jihadist threat and its destabilising effects worldwide" in this chapter.

DRC faced with the risk of an escalation of political instability and armed conflict in 2016

Although the intensity of the war suffered by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has gradually subsided in the last two decades, the armed conflict that broke out in 1998 continues in the eastern part of the country and has killed around five million people to date, according to different sources. There have also been at least 200,000 female victims of sexual violence, which has been and continues to be used as a weapon of war and even persists in post-conflict zones, the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of people and a chronic humanitarian crisis. Some positive aspects, like the end of the violence in most of the country, the start of institutional reforms and economic growth (though distributed unequally), among others, may be compromised by the upcoming electoral cycle, which should help to strengthen the DRC's political system, but may involve many risks. The country is experiencing growing political instability because the second term of Joseph Kabila's presidency is coming to an end. The process to hold 11 direct and indirect local, provincial and national elections before December 2016 began in February 2015, after the publication of the election calendar and the electoral law. The gravity of the situation is demonstrated by the different political initiatives implemented by Kabila's government, the rise in political violence that took place in 2015 and the president's attempts to postpone the presidential election and thereby prolong his mandate, the little progress made in the military operation against the Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and the failure of the amnesty and return of the armed group Mouvement du 23-Mars (M23), which could lead to the resumption of the conflict and influence the overall situation.

The growing political violence in 2015 in DRC and Kabila's attempts to postpone the presidential election and thereby prolong his term of office raises fears that the situation will worsen in 2016

First, the consequences of failing to honour the election calendar must be noted, which may lead to delays in holding elections and an extension of the term of President Joseph Kabila. The Constitution does not allow for a third presidential term, but Kabila has still not expressed whether he would step down and obey the Constitution or consider running for a third tem in the presidential election in 2016. According to the various constitutional provisions, the new legislative and presidential elections must be held prior to 19 December 2016 to elect a new president and members of Parliament, since their term ends on that date. The local elections, scheduled initially for 2008, have been postponed many times, and in January 2015 Parliament adopted a draft bill that included a provision making the holding of the legislative and presidential elections dependent on the organisation of a new national census. However, the technical and financial difficulties of creating such a census prompted many civil society activists and members of the opposition to interpret this provision as manoeuvring to delay the election calendar. On 23 January, after large protests broke out, the controversial provision was struck from the draft bill. However, the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) made implementation of the election calendar dependent on the resolution of 23 external issues linked to the legal framework (census, vote abroad, provincial decentralisation and others) and the availability of funds to carry out the process. Action on some of these issues is delayed and others have not yet been addressed by the competent authorities, so the regime has created conditions that make sticking to the election calendar practically impossible.

This situation has been accompanied by the attempts of President Joseph Kabila to promote a national dialogue since April between the majority coalition in power, the political opposition and civil society. This dialogue intends to address the election calendar, the inclusion in the census of several million voters who have acquired the right to vote since 2011, the funding of the process and security during the elections. Although the sharply divided political opposition expressed its willingness to participate in the process on some occasions, in the end it pulled out of the preliminary consultations, claiming that the dialogue could be used to justify postponing the presidential election in order to prolong Kabila's term of office. The same government coalition has also suffered divisions resulting from the evolution of the process, and in September a group of seven political parties (the G7) of the governing coalition warned Kabila of the risk of destabilising the country if the Constitution is violated. The group asked for the local elections to be held after the national and provincial ones, since they fear that revising the calendar will also cause a delay in the presidential election and mean the de facto prolongation of Kabila's presidency. Due to this position, the G7 was expelled from the government coalition.

Instability and political violence also rose during the year. The most important demonstration in years was staged in January by Congolese civil society with the support of the Catholic Church to curb the attempts to modify the election calendar. The Congolese security forces cracked down hard on this demonstration, the most significant since the elections held in late 2011, killing over 40 people and wounding and arresting hundreds. Political violence has escalated since then and the government has attempted to silence dissidents with threats, violence and arbitrary arrest, according to various local and international human rights organisations. In December 2015, the UN Human Rights Office issued a report published jointly with MONUSCO and the OHCHR covering human rights violations committed between 1 January and 30 September, including a rise in violations of political rights and freedoms

committed by state agents and the prevalence of a climate of impunity. The report stressed the serious human rights abuses and repression by the security forces in January during the protests against the electoral law, and although there were less incidents after March, starting in July there was a resurgence of threats, arbitrary arrests and the cynical use of justice against civil society activists and the media. These restrictions and threats marked a trend of the gradual shrinking of the political space that will likely affect the credibility of the process.

Furthermore, despite the gradual reduction in violence in the eastern part of the country, there are different aspects to bear in mind that may change the current status quo and could contribute to instability across the country. Operation Sukola II, waged by the military against the Rwandan armed group FDLR during 2015, was a failure. The deadline set by the UN Security Council to proceed with the voluntary disarmament of the FDLR following Rwanda's refusal to accept a political dialogue proposed by the armed group and the lack of regional and international pressure in this regard expired in January, giving the green light to military operations against it. Although the FDLR had not launched any military operations against Rwanda since the year 2000, their presence in the DRC had given Rwanda excuses to intervene directly or indirectly through local armed groups allied with Kigali. As the voluntary deadline expired, only 339 FDLR fighters had surrendered out of a total of 1,500. The government launched the limitary operation in February. Many analysts had doubted the government's will to conduct this offensive against what has been its ally at certain times to stop the activities of Rwanda and pro-Rwandan groups in the country. Meanwhile, the UN had announced that it was withdrawing its military support for the Congolese Army against the FDLR after the government refused to replace two generals involved in the operation because they face serious accusations of human rights violations. The government decided to launch the offensive without MONUSCO's support. In fact, Kinshasa has been pressuring to reduce the size of MONUSCO in the country.

These decisions were criticised as populist by various analysts, arguing the need to restore the government's battered image following the slow pace of reforms in the country and the crackdown on the protests in January against the president's desire to amend the Constitution in order to prolong his term of office. Meanwhile, Russ Feingold, the UN representative to the Great Lakes region, resigned. He had been critical of the president's re-election attempts and sceptical of the DRC's real desire to pursue the FDLR. Months into the offensive, towards the end of 2015 the operations had enjoyed limited success since the FDLR had not been broken up and their military capacities and command structures remained intact. In addition to this situation, or directly resulting from it, are the negative developments of the application of the Nairobi Declaration, which two years ago called for the surrender of the armed group M23, amnesty and the return of its former combatants. Though the M23 officially has 2,000 fighters, only 180 members have returned to the DRC. Both the Congolese government and the M23 have accused each other of violating the agreement. The government had denounced the infiltration of former rebels into eastern DRC and around 1,000 former M23 combatants and civilians are estimated to have disappeared from Uganda and Rwanda. Only 640 of the 1,600 people identified in Uganda a year ago are still present. Furthermore, the shortage of funds to pay for the national disarmament and reintegration of former combatants and the proliferation and fragmentation of groups and militias in the east (around 70, according to some sources), demonstrate the persistence of the conflict and even the volatility of the situation. A deterioration in the conflict in the east together with instability potentially stemming from changes that could delay the election calendar and do not result from dialogue and negotiations agreed between the government and the political opposition with the backing of the international community raise fears of a drift to authoritarianism and an escalation of the armed conflict in 2016.

South Sudan: a very fragile peace agreement

After 20 months of a bloody civil war that has claimed tens of thousands of lives and caused a serious humanitarian crisis with more than 2.3 million people displaced from their homes and 4.6 million in an emergency situation due to the high risk of famine, a peace agreement was signed in mid-August 2015 under the auspices of mediation by the IGAD-Plus.[14] The warring parties, the government of South Sudan (GoSS) headed by Salva Kiir and the main opposition group, the SPLA/M-IO, commanded by former Vice President Riek Machar, signed the text proposed by the IGAD-Plus and decreed a cessation of hostilities amidst a climate marked by heavy international pressure, with threats of sanctions and embargoes on both sides if the violence did not stop. The agreement was signed first by Machar on 17 August and then by Kiir on 26 August. The GoSS printed its signature in the text, showing its dissatisfaction with it and with how it had been achieved, through pressure and threats, and included a list of 16 reservations to the agreement that were not accepted by the IGAD-Plus.[15] The resulting peace agreement consists of measures in seven different areas of action: 1) national unity transitional government; 2) permanent ceasefire and security mechanisms; 3) humanitarian assistance and reconstruction; 4) economic and financial resources; 5) transitional justice, accountability, reconciliation and restitution; 6) the Constitution; and the 7) monitoring and evaluation commission.[16]

The distance that the GoSS maintains from the terms of the agreement prompt it to unilaterally take important political steps that are putting peace in South Sudan at risk

The IGAD-Plus presented the agreement as the definitive text for achieving peace and national reconstruction, even after up to nine previous agreements were never signed. However, events related to the external threats and pressure that got both sides to sign it, as well as developments in the situation in the closing months of the year, have raised concern about compliance with it. Therefore, various events are affecting the process, representing warning scenarios that may reignite the fighting in 2016.

First, it should be noted that the agreement was reached without the consent and approval of the warring parties, posing a major risk to its continuity. The GoSS not only expressed its dissatisfaction with how the deal was signed, but also objected to the text, including an appendix of 16 reservations to it. This document included important aspects that clash with major articles of the agreement, which is described as "humiliation", "rewarding rebellion" and even "neo-colonialist". Many analysts have interpreted this point of departure as a major weakness in the process, since it limits the parties' ownership of the commitments acquired, making their application difficult. This was seen in the first few months of their implementation, where the failure to meet the stipulated deadlines was evident. For example, the national unity transitional government, which was the fundamental institution of the agreement and was supposed to be created within a maximum of 90 days after it was signed, had still not been created at the end of the year.

In a second risk scenario, which is directly linked to the previous one, the distance that the GoSS maintains from the terms of the agreement prompt it to unilaterally take important political steps that should be the responsibility of the transitional government. These steps are placing the value of the deal in doubt and putting great stress on relations with the opposition. One of the measures taken independently by Kiir was related to the dismissal of three governors in the region of Equatoria, which provoked harsh political criticism. Another measure adopted outside the peace process was the dissolution of all of the leadership structures of the SPLM except the office of the president. A similar event set off the crisis in December 2013 that started the civil war. Opposition leader Riek Machar criticised the move harshly, describing it as a threat to peace. This action ignores the Arusha Declaration signed in Tanzania in January 2015, in which the different factions of the SPLM (government, SPLA/M-IO and the faction SPLM 7) achieved an agreement for reunification in Tanzania aimed at reconciling all three factions and facilitating peace talks.

However, of all the risks that the government is running with its unilateral policies, the move creating the greatest controversy is undoubtedly the announcement on 2 October that South Sudan would adopt a federal state system. Kiir's government announced fragmenting the current administrative divisions, based on 10 states, into 28 federal states. The new system designed by the president, without consulting the opposition forces, changes the territorial divisions established by the current Constitution by creating new boundaries based mainly on ethnic characteristics. In the new proposed scheme, the Dinka group, of which Kiir and the senior officials of the GoSS are members, would obtain administrative control of 42% of the country's territory, with 12 of the 28 proposed states,

14. The IGAD-Plus consists of the members of the IGAD (Sudan, South Sudan, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia and Uganda), some AU countries (Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Chad and Algeria) and finally by China, Russia, Egypt and the Troika (the United States, the United Kingdom and Norway).
15. See the list of the 16 reservations of the GoSS to the peace agreement: https://es.scribd.com/doc/276484376/On-South-Sudan-Salva-Kiir-s-12-Pages-of-Reservations-to-CPA.
16. See the full peace agreement at: http://southsudan.igad.int/index.php/91-demo-contents/news/299-agreement-on-the-resolution-of-the-conflict-in-the-republic-of-south-sudan.

compared to the 25% administrative control that it possesses under the 10-state system. Moreover, the Nuer community, which holds a majority in the SPLA/M-IO and to which Machar belongs, would go from having 15% administrative control under the 10-state system to 13% under the new divisions proposed. Riek Machar asserted that this new unilateral decree was a serious violation of the peace agreement, jeopardising its continuity, and emphasised that it could derail the agreement if it does not revoke it. The IGAD-Plus also vigorously condemned Kiir's announcement. Expressing concern and warning the government that the announcement directly contradicts the agreement, the IGAD-Plus stated that any fundamental change in the country must be made under the national unity transitional government, urging Kiir to withdraw the decree.

One interpretation of this government strategy is related to blocking one of the clauses of the agreement that the government had vetoed in its list of 16 reservations. Article 15 of Chapter 1 stipulates the creation of transitional governments in the states of Jonglei, Upper Nile and Unity. The two latter states would come under the administration of the opposition, whereas Jonglei would remain in government hands. With the new proposed divisions, both states would fragment into three parts: in Unity State, two parts would be dominated by a Nuer majority and one would be under Dinka control, while in Upper Nile State, which would also change its physical borders, one part would be controlled by the Nuer, another by the Dinka and the third by the Shilluk. Therefore, both states designed in the peace process that were supposed to be governed by the opposition would be subdivided into six, of which it would control only three. This new administrative division designed by the GoSS is a serious obstacle to the aforementioned Article 15, which has been blasted by the SPLM/A-IO. Another problem that the unilateral fragmentation of the country is creating, and that Kiir himself has recognised, relates to the boundaries of the new states. Many of them do not follow the current lines of territorial demarcation, creating a new source of tension and confrontation that could result in fresh military disputes.

The measure causing the most controversy is the announcement that South Sudan would adopt a federal state system, fragmenting the current administrative divisions, based on 10 states, into 28 federal states

A third threat to the peace process is the growing internal division and fragmentation of the parties, as well as the emergence of new armed actors in the country. As soon as the peace agreement was signed, division and splintering appeared on both sides. On the GoSS side, senior military officers questioned the document and described it as a form of surrender to the rebels. On the SPLA/M-IO side, a group of commanders deserted and announced the creation of another armed movement opposed to the agreement. In turn, other armed groups that existed when the treaty was signed, like the Revolutionary Movement For National Salvation (REMNASA) and the South Sudan National Liberation Movement (SSNLM), did not sign it, demonstrating that they were continuing with armed struggle. Later, in November 2015, at least two new armed groups emerged. In the state of Equatoria, local media reported the appearance of the South Sudan People's Patriotic Front (SSPPF), which declared war on the government and in the state of Upper Nile. Furthermore, in reaction to the new border division, which divides the Shilluk Kingdom and delivers some of its land to the Dinka Apadang community, members of the Shilluk ethnic group created the Tiger Faction New Forces (TFNF), affirming their intention to fight against the government and to not lay down their weapons until the new administrative divisions are overturned.

Fourth, the peace agreement has been unable to effectively maintain the agreed ceasefire, resulting in different clashes between the parties and expanding military action due to the growing presence of new belligerent actors. These repeated violations of the cessation of hostilities could make the current agreement worthless by resuming large-scale clashes or at least make it difficult to implement other chapters of the agreement as a consequence of the insecurity. The IGAD Monitoring and Verification Mechanism has reported 50 violations of the ceasefire since the first cessation of hostilities signed in February 2014, five of which have occurred since the agreement in August (three by the government and two by the SPLA/M-IO).

This series of elements represents a serious risk for peacekeeping in the country. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warned that the constant ceasefire violations, as well as the parties' failure to meet the stipulated deadlines in implementing the agreement, seriously compromise peace in the country. At this juncture, predicting a new escalation of violence, the Secretary-General recommended that the UN Security Council maintain the UNMISS mission, which ended operations on 15 December, and send 1,100 extraordinary UN peacekeepers to protect civilians and improve security in camps for displaced people. Much will depend on the role of the international mediators and pressure from the international community if the country is to make progress in national reconciliation and overcome the different risk scenarios that are calling the path to peace of the newest country in Africa into question.

Venezuela, a new political scenario marked by polarised branches of government

The opposition's resounding victory in the parliamentary elections has opened a new political scenario marked by polarisation between the executive and legislative branches of government. After more than 15 years of absolute control over the institutions that had allowed Chavism to enact the reforms necessary to carry out its socialist project, the elections on 6 December were a major blow to the regime and its Bolivarian revolution, giving rise to an uncertain scenario characterised by the fear of increased political tensions, greater social polarisation and possible outbreaks of violence.

In legislative elections envisaged as complicated beforehand by the executive government headed by Nicolás Maduro, the opposition coalition, Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD), won a resounding victory, attaining 112 seats of the 167 that make up the National Assembly and reaching the qualified majority of 2/3 of the chamber, which gives it absolute control over it. According to data provided by the National Electoral Council (CNE), with 74.25% turnout, the MUD won 67.07% of the votes (7,707,422 votes), while the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) carried 32.93% (5,599,025 votes), giving it 55 seats. The MUD obtained 343,000 more votes than those won by Henrique Capriles in the presidential election in 2013, while the PSUV lost nearly two million votes in comparison.[17] These results mark Chavism's second electoral defeat in 15 years (the first was the referendum to reform the Constitution in 2007[18]) and are the worst in its history in terms of popular support, dealing a serious blow to the regime. One of the interpretations offered by local analysts about the opposition's comfortable victory is related to its ability to unite and bring forces together, as well as its major vote mobilisation efforts thanks to a local context characterised by powerful social discontent with the economic crisis and its effects on product shortages and high inflation in the country.

After more than 15 years of absolute control of government institutions by Chavism, the regime has taken a heavy blow that gives rise to an uncertain scenario characterised by the fear of increased political tensions, greater social polarisation and possible outbreaks of violence

The opposition alliance emerged from the elections significantly stronger, with an absolute majority in Parliament that grants it the possibility to transform national politics and the ability in the chamber to approve important organic laws, amend the Constitution, repeal enabling laws, cast votes of no confidence and dismiss the vice president and ministers of the country, appoint and remove electoral officials and more. In brief, it may now take the initiative in Parliament. The opposition forces are even ready to resume collecting signatures to promote a recall referendum in 2016 that could lead to a new presidential election, thereby preventing President Maduro from finishing his term, which ends in 2019.

However, the Venezuelan government retains the ability to respond, since it still controls all state powers de facto and can use the figure of the president and the government-controlled Supreme Court of Justice to block any parliamentary initiative, vetoing whatever it deems unconstitutional.

This new national political scenario, which will officially begin on 5 January 2016 when the new National Assembly is constituted, is viewed with hope by the Venezuelan political opposition, which is anxious for important change and reforms in the direction that the country is taking. It is also a crisis of major dimensions, according to Maduro, and threatens the government's socialist project. In this polarisation of interests, and with a new balance of forces in Venezuela, it is to be expected that political tensions, confrontation in a fragmented society and even outbreaks of violence are potential future risk scenarios for the country. In fact, both sides' reactions to the election results have given a glimpse of the pulse looming in the new correlation of positions.

Even during the election campaign, Maduro's government, employed contradictory discourses in a hypothetical scenario of defeat. For example, he declared his willingness to recognise any adverse situation that might arise, while at the same time using threatening allegations concerning the possibility of an opposition victory, saying that the revolution would never "surrender" in any way. As the results were made public and the blow suffered by the government became clear, his declarations gradually rose in tone, making it obvious that he would not extend any bridge of dialogue and would defend the Chavist legacy, although he also showed a more moderate side, recognising the opposition's victory as an achievement for the national democratic system. In this polarised discourse, the government has tried to interpret the results as the triumph of the counter-revolution through an economic war to topple it and has warned that it would set off a major crisis leading to significant tensions. As these statements rose in tone, the government reacted by taking advantage of the last few weeks of parliamentary control to try to protect its power. Diosdado

17. The presidential election of 2013, the first after the death of Hugo Chávez, had a turnout of 79.68% and handed victory to Nicolás Maduro, with 50.61% of the vote (7,587,579), compared to the 49.12% won by opposition candidate Henrique Capriles, who received 7,363,980 votes.
18. On 2 December 2007, a referendum was held to amend the Constitution. Over three million Venezuelans abstained, enabling the "no" vote to win in the first setback for Chavism.

Cabello, the speaker of the National Assembly and the ruling party's second-in-command, announced the appointment of 12 new judges to the TSJ and the designated the judge that convicted opposition figure Leopoldo López, Susana Barreiros, to be the general public defender of Venezuela. These moves make it perfectly clear that for the time being, Maduro's government has reacted defensively, trying to protect its policies while also attempting to send a message of cohesion faced with possible internal divisions within the party and its allies due to the election debacle, which has shown again, like after the narrow victory in the 2013 presidential election, that Maduro is not Chávez, and that the death of the emblematic Venezuelan leader was the beginning of the end of a trend in national politics.

Furthermore, different internal fault lines run through the opposition. While it managed to smooth them over to run in the election as a coalition, they remain present. This includes a hard line group, led by Leopoldo López, currently sentenced to over 13 years in prison, which will seek a recall referendum to put an end to Maduro's government, and another more moderate group headed by Capriles that aims to build bridges of dialogue to begin the national transition. One of the first measures that the opposition has announced that it will raise as a bloc in the first sessions and that may lead to the first clash with the government will be related to approval of the amnesty law, which will benefit around 80 people that the opposition considers political prisoners. The president has already flatly declared that the law will not be approved under any circumstances.

The legislative elections in Venezuela gave a resounding victory to the opposition bloc, attaining 112 seats of the 167 that make up the National Assembly and reaching the qualified majority of 2/3 of the chamber, which grants it absolute control over it

In this scenario, some prominent elements will influence the future of political life. First is the social impact that the measures necessary to alleviate the serious economic crisis currently gripping Venezuela will have on it, conditioned by the collapse in oil prices that has reduced government revenues. Widespread social discontent could increase based on whether or not the country emerges from its economic crisis and on the nature of these measures, along with the unpopularity that they could entail, which the government has so far tried to avoid, sinking deeper into the crisis of governance. Meanwhile, the role played by the Venezuelan Armed Forces will be crucial. It remains to be seen if they will stay loyal to the Chavist regime in the new political cycle or will take the side of legality, as some sectors of the military have indicated.

Venezuela's new political situation, which has substantially changed the balance of forces after 15 years, will undoubtedly give rise to new tensions and disputes between executive and legislative branches of government that are completely polarised, loaded with historical grievances and conflicts that can degenerate and further rattle the nation's political scene, widening the gaps and fragmentation of society and leading to new outbreaks of violence.

Afghanistan: the lack of legitimacy of the new Taliban leadership and its impact on the peace process

On 7 July 2015, representatives of the Taliban movement and the Afghan government sat down at the negotiating table for the first time in the Pakistani city of Murri in order to find negotiated solutions to the armed conflict ravaging the country. During the previous months, in rounds of meetings in different scenarios, the conditions for rapprochement were established. However, the meetings were held amidst the most violent insurgent offensive in recent years. Nevertheless, the signals coming from the parties were contradictory. While acting Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansoor agreed to negotiate (on behalf of leader Mullah Omar), a series of messages from the political bureau delegitimised the Taliban delegation in Murri. The divisions arising from the negotiations with the government required the Taliban leader to give his opinion publicly. Therefore, on 15 July, Mullah Mansoor conveyed a message from Mullah Omar[19] backing the negotiations with the government, though it also reminded that the office in Doha was in charge of the Taliban's political affairs. The day before the second round of negotiations, planned for 30 July, Mullah Omar was reported dead. The following day, the Taliban admitted the same and appointed Mullah Mansoor as his successor. Disagreements were made public immediately. The leader's death was evidence of the manipulations of Mullah Mansoor, who had spent years managing the movement and, according to his detractors, manipulating its leaders and commanders to assume leadership of it. However, the process not only divided the Taliban. President Ashraf Ghani's support for the negotiations amidst the violence and his rapprochement with Pakistan weakened his position in the divided government of Afghanistan.

While the Taliban resolve their leadership problems, dissidents may form more radical groups or join Islamic State (ISIS), which is already present in some provinces

After 14 years of armed conflict, the need to reach a peace agreement between the Taliban movement and the Afghan government became obvious for all parties involved. The United States, which for a long time purposed a strategy to eliminate the insurgency completely, finally admitted that the only way to end the conflict was through dialogue with the Taliban. The first meetings explored the parties' demands. These preliminary meetings were the first step towards opening the Taliban's political office in Qatar as their official representative body, including in the reconciliation process. In 2009, there were several meetings between German and Taliban representatives in Dubai.[20] At the International Conference on Afghanistan in London in January 2010, Hamid Karzai received definitive support when he submitted his road map for reconciliation and reintegration.[21] Among other meetings, UN representative Kai Eide sat down with a Taliban delegation sent by Mullah Baradar in Dubai at the start of 2010, there were several meetings between Afghan MPs, members of the Hizb-e Islami and of the Taliban in the Maldives in February and May 2010 and the United States held intermittent meetings between 2010 and 2012 in Germany and Qatar. In January 2012, after a round of consultations with all Taliban groups (including both commanders in the field and unofficial governors), the Taliban office in Doha officially declared its willingness to begin political efforts to resolve the conflict. The year 2015 began with a new round of meetings described as "simple contacts" in Qatar, China, Dubai and Norway between representatives of the Afghan High Peace Council and the Taliban. This process ended on 7 July in Murri.

However, the revelation of the death of Mullah Omar (the official date was April 2013) marked a turning point, shedding light on the power struggles that had thus far taken place in private. Omar had been a figure that united the movement. Obedience to the emir was a religious duty that was part of Taliban doctrine,[22] though rumours of his death had been constant since he vanished from the public eye at least a decade before. Akhtar Mansoor was the minister of civil aviation and tourism under the Taliban government. According to his official biography, in 2007 he was one of the two acting leaders, the other being Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar. When Baradar was imprisoned in Pakistan in 2010, he became the acting leader of the Islamic Emirate and of the Taliban leadership council.[23] Opposition to Mansoor centred on various well-known leaders and members of Mullah Omar's family.[24] His main adversary is Mullah Abdul Qayyum Zakir, who has always been opposed to negotiations. Zakir is a veteran leader and commander of the insurgency in the south, which like the militarily strongest groups is opposed to the talks. He has a history of clashing with Mansoor, which worsened after the office was opened in Doha. Furthermore, Zakir has always been opposed to Mansoor's leadership. In fact, after months of verbal sparring, Mansoor dismissed him as a commander "on behalf" of Omar in August 2014.

19. His edicts and political opinions were published twice per year, during the festivals of 'Eid ul-Fitr and 'Eid ul-Adha.
20. Thomas Ruttig, "Is the Afghan Peace Process Really in Shambles?", *Afganistão*, Naçao e Defesa. no. 130, Lisbon, 2011, pp. 31-54.
21. Thomas Ruttig, "The Taliban Arrest Wave. Reasserting Strategic Depth?" *CTC Sentinell*, Vol 3(3), pp. 3-6, 3 March 2010
22. Michael Semple, "The Mullah Omar Myth", *Politico*, 30 July 2015.
23. According to B. Rubin, his support base could reach 40%, while Mullah Zakir may control around 20%. Barnett Rubin, "Turmoil in the Taliban", *The New Yorker*, 31 July 2015.
24. Mullah Omar's younger brother, Abdul Mannan, and son, Mullah Muhammad Yakub.

Regarding the Afghan government, shortly after he was sworn in as president on 29 September 2014, Ashraf Ghani made two official trips to the countries closest to Pakistan: Saudi Arabia and China. He visited Pakistan not long thereafter, despite the opposition of Parliament and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah. Prior to his trip in November, the chief of staff of the Armed Forces, General Raheel Sharif, and the director of Pakistan's intelligence service, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) had visited Kabul. To achieve success in the negotiations, Ghani believed it was necessary to involve Pakistan in the process. According to him, Pakistan was obliged to cooperate with the Afghan government, since he thought that the conflict was not being waged between his government and the Taliban, but between Afghanistan and Pakistan. But the pressure to which Pakistan was subjected to make the Taliban sit down to negotiate demonstrated both its position of power in the process and the fact that it did not control all its leadership.

Pakistan has not changed its strategic vision of what it wants in Afghanistan. Although the government has always denied it, the Taliban leadership has been located in the capital of the province of Balochistan, Quetta, since the US invasion in 2001. Since the announcement of the withdrawal of foreign troops, Pakistan has moved closer to the Taliban leadership in an attempt to establish an alliance. The election of Mullah Mansoor was understood in this light, as it was done in haste and on Pakistani soil. With the date of the withdrawal of the last troops in mind, since March 2015, Pakistan has increasingly pressured the Taliban to sit down to negotiate. The role of the political office in Qatar was questioned from the beginning, and not only due to divisions over reconciliation. In large part, the problem has to do with the control that Pakistan wants to exercise in the negotiations. One of the reasons that it was opened was to conduct official contacts in a more neutral environment. Although they were seen as mere puppets of Pakistan, the Taliban showed their intention to keep the reconciliation process away from its influence. But from the beginning of the meetings, Pakistan made its stance clear that it would not allow them to continue without its knowledge or consent. An example of this was the arrest of Mullah Baradar in February 2010, when it became known that it was holding negotiations with the Afghan government independently.[25]

A number of Taliban accused Pakistan of manipulating the meeting in Murri and some even claimed that they were not authorised to negotiate.[26] Moreover, members of the ISI were seated next to them. A similar accusation was made after the meeting in Urumqi (Xinjiang, China), when Pakistan was unable to bring relevant leaders to the table. This delegation consisted of Mullah Abdul Jalil (former acting foreign minister), Mullah Hassan Rahmani (former governor of Kandahar) and Mullah Abdul Razaq (former minister of the interior) and had no connection with the Taliban political commission or influence in their hierarchy.[27] Mohammad Naim Wardak, the spokesman for the office in Qatar, accused Pakistan of "hijacking the process by bringing unelected and non-representative members of the movement to the table".[28] The Taliban also wanted the meeting in Murri to be secret, but Pakistan made the negotiations public.

While waiting for the Taliban to resolve their leadership problems, it must be kept in mind that dissidents may form more radical groups or join the armed group Islamic State (ISIS), which is present in some provinces. In fact, a new splinter group in Zabul led by Mullah Rasool Akhund is fighting alongside ISIS. A divided Taliban movement hopes that the future agreement with the government will be fragile and will not be respected. In addition to further weakening President Ghani's position in the government, pressure from the US administration, which has elections on the horizon and a troop withdrawal plan scheduled for December 2017, is putting the process at risk by trying to speed it up. Moreover, Pakistan cannot keep up the duplicity of launching a military offensive against the Taliban while it continues to harbour Afghan Taliban, even though this year saw the largest campaign of violence since 2001. The future of Afghan reconciliation depends on it.

25. Thomas Ruttig, "The Taliban Arrest Wave. Reasserting Strategic Depth?", op. cit.
26. Abdul Latif Mansoor, Haji Ibrahim Haqqani and Mullah Abbas. Barnett Rubin, "Turmoil in the Taliban", op.cit.
27. These three leaders later came out against the appointment of Mullah Mansoor as leader. B. Rubin, What Could Mullah Mohammad Omar's Death Mean for the Taliban Talks? *The New Yorker,* 29 July 2015.
28. Abubakar Siddique, "Talks divide Taliban. Herald an End to its Relationship with Islamabad", Gandhara, 10 July 2015.

Philippines: The peace process in Mindanao, at the crossroads

In March 2014, after over 17 years of negotiations, the government of the Philippines and the armed opposition group Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) signed the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro to try to put an end to the armed conflict that dates back to the end of the 1960s and that according to some sources has caused the deaths of over 120,000 people and forcibly displaced more than two million people in Mindanao, the southern region of the country. Previously, in October 2012, both parties had laid the foundations for this historic event by signing the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro, facilitated by the government of Malaysia. In general terms, the peace agreement provides for the demobilisation of the MILF and the replacement of the current Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) after a MILF-led transitional period led with a new entity called Bangsamoro that would have more extensive powers and territory than the ARMM. However, Congress must pass a law that specifies the content of the peace agreement and regulates the new Bangsamoro autonomous entity in order for the peace process to remain on track and for the peace agreement to be implemented. This law would later be ratified in a referendum in the affected parts of Mindanao. The draft of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), a kind of constitution of statute of autonomy for Bangsamoro, was finalised in early 2014. After several months during which the government reviewed the constitutionality and political viability of its content, it was sent to Congress to be urgently processed and approved. However, Congress has not passed the BBL since then and voices firmly opposed to the peace agreement are multiplying, generating great unease within the MILF and much uncertainty about the future of the peace process and even about the possible resumption of violence in Mindanao.

Congress must pass a law that specifies the content of the peace agreement and regulates the new autonomous entity of Bangsamoro in order for the peace process in the Philippines to remain on track and for the peace agreement to be implemented

Pressure against the president, the government and Congress to slow down or even halt approval of the BBL rose substantially in early January, when around 70 people, including 44 members of a special police corps were killed in the town of Mamasapano (Maguindanao province) in a clash involving the MILF, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF, a MILF splinter group opposed to the peace talks) and others. The battle led to one of the worst crises of confidence between the government and the MILF in recent years and caused the indefinite suspension of congressional proceedings regarding the aforementioned law. Although the House of Representatives resumed its deliberations in April, a significant proportion of the MPs and many media outlets openly expressed their opposition to the BBL on the grounds that it is unconstitutional and because they doubt that the MILF intends to disarm. In this regard, in June the Philippine Constitution Association and a political party filed a request with the Supreme Court to declare both the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro as unconstitutional because they violated various provisions of the Constitution and included concessions that exceeded the powers of the government. It bears reminding that in 2008, the Supreme Court's decision to declare as unconstitutional the peace agreement signed between the government and the MILF, known as the Memorandum of Agreement on the Ancestral Domain, caused an internal split within the MILF, the emergence of the BIFF and the most significant spiral of violence experienced by the region in recent years.

Meanwhile, the Senate and the House of Representatives approved two draft bills very far removed from the original proposals agreed between the government and the MILF. The chair of the Senate committee in charge of the legislative proceedings of the BBL declared that 80% of the content of the original version of the law had been changed. In fact, the MILF's leaders complained that the previous versions of the BBL envisaged even lower levels of self-government than in the current ARMM. In addition to the disagreements over the content of the BBL, the MILF's confidence in the peace process was also eroded by the constant delays in the legislative proceedings since September 2014. Following the pressure exerted throughout the year by President Benigno Aquino and the government on Congress, the speakers of both chambers promised to pass the BBL around mid-December. However, many analysts warned that the urgency and importance of the debate over budgets in 2016 and the start of the election campaign in early 2016 ahead of the elections in May leave little time and room for the approval of the BBL. In December, Aquino met directly with over one hundred MPs to convince Congress of the virtues of the peace agreement, but at the end of the year some MPs openly declared there was no way that the BBL would be passed.

Faced with these difficulties and delays, on various occasions throughout the year, the MILF warned of the risks if the BBL is not approved in the end and clearly stated its opposition to the approval of any law that deviated substantially from the letter and spirit of the peace agreement. Specifically, the MILF declared that it would stop surrendering weapons and demobilising its fighters, processes that began symbolically in June, admitted that it is under pressure to abandon the peace talks and to write off approval of the BBL as impossible, asserted that it could not guarantee control over the internal factions opposed to the peace process and warned of the chances that the collapse of the peace process may cause ideological radicalisation in Mindanao, provide greater legitimacy to voices and groups committed to continuing the armed struggle and clearly increase calls for independence in the region. In this regard, the MILF leadership indicated

that the international community would hold the Philippine government responsible if war broke out again in Mindanao.

Whether the Supreme Court declares the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro as unconstitutional or Congress refuses to pass a draft of the BBL that the MILF deems acceptable, there is a risk that the most intransigent and militaristic MILF factions will end up imposing themselves and dragging the MILF back to the armed conflict, or that some of the armed groups operating in Mindanao will view their military strategy as legitimised and boost their numbers through the influx of former MILF combatants. Concerning the first point, on more than one occasion both the MILF and the government recalled that any step forward in the MILF's disarmament and demobilisation process is linked to any progress that might occur in implementing the peace agreement. According to this agreement, in addition to the symbolic ceremony that started the process carried out in June, 30% of the MILF's combatants would demobilise following approval of the BBL, another 35% after the creation of a police force in the new Bangsamoro region and the remaining 30% when implementation of the peace agreement is finalised. According to most estimates, the MILF has between 10,000 and 12,000 combatants, making it quite a considerable force.

Moreover, some armed groups that also operate in Mindanao and claim to fight for goals similar to those of the MILF and represent the same group (the Moro people) could clearly be strengthened if the current peace process fails. For example, in the second half of the 1990s, the problems in implementing the 1996 peace accord between the government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) strengthened the MILF, which opposed the deal. In 2008, the collapse of the peace agreement between the government and the MILF led to the emergence of the BIFF, a group clearly opposed to dialogue with the government that was behind some of the main acts of violence in the region until mid-2015. Even though the intensity of the counterinsurgency operations of the Philippine government and the death of its leader and founder Ameril Umbra Kato weakened the group, it cannot be ruled out that the sudden sinking of the peace process could bolster the BIFF's position. Likewise, some MNLF factions have expressed their opposition to the peace process between the MILF and the government because they think that the peace accord reached by both parties in 2014 invalidates and replaces much of the content of the peace agreement signed between the MNLF and the government in 1996. Some MNLF leaders, like its founder, Nur Misuari, were more belligerent about it and declared their willingness to welcome combatants disillusioned or dissatisfied with the MILF's official line into their ranks and continue fighting for the establishment of a Bangsamoro republic in Mindanao. Other MNLF leaders have been more conciliatory towards the MILF, but they have all stressed the difficulties that the BBL faces in recapturing the aspirations of the MNLF and including substantial aspects of the 1996 peace agreement. It beards reminding that the MILF split off from the MNLF in the late 1970s and that some of its strongholds are close to those of the MNLF.

So far, both the MILF and the government have publicly demonstrated their commitment to the dialogue and have expressed hope that a BBL respectful of the peace agreement is approved before Benigno Aquino's term of office ends in late June. Furthermore, the international community has been significantly involved in both the negotiations and implementation of the agreement and major demonstrations in favour of the peace process in Mindanao were reported in 2015. Also of note, the MILF and the government have maintained an active ceasefire agreement since 2003 and in recent years the levels of violence between the parties have been practically non-existent. Nevertheless, the peace process is currently in an enormously complex situation. Even the best-case scenario (early adoption of the BBL) would entail a significant delay with regard to the road map originally outlined and would leave implementation of the most substantive aspects of the peace agreement to the next administration. In fact, some presidential candidates have already expressed scepticism about a peace process not designed by their own government, but inherited from the previous one. Nor can the worst-case scenario, the sudden end of the peace process, be ruled out. On previous occasions, such an event has led to dramatic new cycles of violence.

The conflict between Turkey and the PKK: the risks of further deterioration

In 2015 the conflict between Turkey and the PKK Kurdish guerrillas, which has caused tens of thousands of fatalities, displacements, disappearances and high levels of trauma since to the 1980s, returned to serious violence after the collapse of the dialogue, involving various disturbing aspects. These included increasingly penetrating questions about the government's vision of a solution to the conflict, the urbanisation of the war and increase of indiscriminate impacts, greater "Syrianisation" of the Kurdish issue in Turkey and the emergence of ISIS as a destabilising force on Turkish soil and the deterioration of the social climate in the streets. In addition, the return to open warfare between Turkey and the PKK is taking place in a context of democratic rollback across Turkey, accentuated by a key election year. If the situation is not corrected in the short term, it could drift into greater complexity with more impacts on the civilian population.

Worrisome aspects in the short and medium term include the fact that 2015 was the year that the Imrali dialogue collapsed. The process had begun in early 2013 and was preceded by the Oslo talks (2009-2011). Furthermore, open warfare between Turkey and the PKK resumed in June 2015. Several factors led to this transition from dialogue to war, such as the cumulative fragility of the dialogue process, including the lack of adequate mechanisms for its own development, the lack of a framework or a clear and acceptable joint road map and unrealistic expectations (for example, government expectations that the PKK would automatically abandon its armed struggle after the Dolmabahçe declaration in February). Finally, looming in the background is the basic question of whether the government truly desires a negotiated solution, even though Erdogan was the one driving the dialogue, or if it was the process itself that failed. The rather indiscriminate military campaign that followed leads one to think that it was more a lack of clear will.

The collapse of the dialogue between Ankara and the PKK, the urbanisation of the war and the "Syrianisation" of the Kurdish issue in Turkey indicate risks of further deterioration in the conflict

Other factors in the transition from dialogue to war have been the influence of the elections on the peace process in a context of maximum rivalry between the AKP and the HDP (and in which the Kurdish movement competed as a party for the first time, challenging the high 10% threshold) and of great political and social polarisation concerning Erdogan's attempts to promote a shift to a presidential regime. After the AKP lost votes in the elections in June, followed by a lack of agreement to form a coalition government, it seems that the military campaign and the emphasis on anti-terrorist discourse helped the AKP to stage a big comeback in the November elections. Still, the HDP managed to surpass the 10% threshold. It remains to be seen whether parliamentary political pluralism and a solid formal dialogue between the government and the PKK really fits within the AKP's project of political hegemony.

Moreover, although the return to violence is not a new dynamic, it has taken on a new aspect: the urbanisation of the war. The escalation of violence since July 2015 has not only included bombardments in remote areas, but also large-scale anti-terrorist operations in urban neighbourhoods in the southeast. The government presented the operations as actions against the PKK, which included curfews and blockades in towns. According to local human rights organisations, these offensives have caused civilian fatalities, including children, as well as other impacts on human security and indiscriminate effects like displacement, power cuts, restrictions on access to water, food and healthcare and some miscarriages due to psychological stress. The restrictions on movement have hindered adequate media coverage and access to observers. These operations and the general military campaign fall within the context of a strengthening of the Turkish Army as an ally of the AKP, despite their previous rivalry. Thus, the doctrine of war is regaining strength and the focus on dialogue is receding.

Meanwhile, the PKK has driven the reinforcement of armed pro-Kurdish militias in the southeast, promoting their organisation and providing weapons, according to some sources. The perspectives of the local population are diverse, ranging from local support for the militias in neighbourhoods affected by the special operations to rejection of the PKK's strategy by the Kurdish population in other neighbourhoods who fear that instability reaches their streets. As such, the daily atmosphere is deteriorating and weapons are increasing in the streets. In any case, analysts indicate that though still autonomous, the militias continue to recognise the ultimate authority of the PKK, ruling out uncontrolled spirals of violence in the short term. The deployment of the urban militias has gone hand in hand with unilateral declarations of autonomy in various locations, rejected by the state through its special operations and demonstrating the gap separating both sides.

A third factor of concern is the "Syrianisation" of the conflict. The advance of Kurdish forces in northern Syria, organised around the PYD party and the PKK-linked YPG/YPJ guerrillas, and the growing international support that they openly or covertly receive as a key allied force on the ground in the fight against ISIS, including by the United States and Russia, has increased concerns in Turkey. Ankara wants to prevent the strengthening of the PKK and the consolidation of Kurdish self-government at all costs, in addition to its major objective, the overthrow of Assad, and has cautioned that its red line holds that Kurdish forces in Syria cannot expand west of the Euphrates. Thus, Turkey launched some attacks against

the Kurds in Syria in late 2015. At the same time, Turkey remains important to the United States, which benefits from approval to use the Turkish military base at Incirlik as part of the international coalition's campaign. Russia's greater involvement in Syria in the last quarter of 2015, with its vast military power, as well as the crisis between Turkey and Russia over Turkey's downing of a Russian plane, represents a tectonic shift whose full range of consequences for Ankara and the Kurdish issue have yet to be seen. Meanwhile, for the first time in the history of the PKK, Syria has taken on crucial strategic, symbolic and survival-related importance for the Kurdish movement in Turkey, exemplified in the response to the siege of Kobane by ISIS between late 2014 and early 2015 and in its project of self-government. The Kurds of Syria and Turkey accuse Ankara of directly or indirectly supporting ISIS, the main enemy of the Syrian Kurds. The presence of PKK forces in Iraq fighting against ISIS must also not be forgotten, as well as questions about the impacts it could have on relations between the PKK and the ruling Kurdish KDP party, an ally or Turkey. These relations have ranged from rivalry to occasional pragmatic cooperation. Neither the KDP nor Turkey want to see a rise of PKK influence in the region, but the KDP may also serve as a pragmatic bridge between the PKK and Turkey. Therefore, despite the differential and particular dynamics, the regional context directly influences the Kurdish issue in Turkey. Whether it does so decisively remains to be seen.

It remains to be seen whether there is any genuine desire in the Erdogan regime's project of political hegemony to find a peaceful and negotiated solution to the Kurdish conflict

Linked to the "Syrianisation" of the Kurdish conflict in Turkey, groups allied with ISIS appeared on Turkish soil. In 2015, this became clear in attacks in Diyarbakir (against an HDP meeting in June, killing around 50 people and injuring hundreds), Suruç (against a Turkish and Kurdish delegation in support of Kobane in July, killing around 30 people and injuring hundreds) and Ankara (against a march in favour of peace talks heavily attended by Kurds in October, killing around 100 people and injuring over 400). The Kurdish movement blamed the Turkish government, claiming that it supports ISIS. Analysts highlighted government negligence in terms of security and the consequences of its insufficient control of the border with Syria. People with links to ISIS were arrested for the attacks. Media outlets indicated that there were ISIS cells in Turkey largely inspiring youth of Kurdish origin influenced by a complex context of victimisation and exposed to radicalisation. According to these reports, there are still no foundations for ISIS to become a social movement in Turkey, countered in part by the space occupied by the Islamist Hüda Par party, which does not support ISIS, but there is a risk that ISIS cells exploit lines of division and that the climate surrounding the Kurdish issue in Turkey deteriorates.

Another noteworthy factor is the profusion of violent incidents in the streets, clearly made visible during the June election campaign, in which many HDP offices were attacked in many parts of the country. There have also been messages of incitement to hatred in media outlets and social networks and acts of violence and intimidation against the media and people that do not follow government policy lines. In football fields, this straining of the social atmosphere has been seen in booing and insults during the minutes of silence for the victims of attacks like in Suruç and Ankara. Some journalists point to the base of followers of the AKP. Whether these actions were directed or not, there is a risk of further unravelling of the social climate in the streets, expressed along ethnic and political lines.

Finally, 2015 was also a year of increased democratic regression. The rollback of the freedom of the press and freedom of expression, the violent crackdowns on demonstrations and the arrests of civilians accused of having links to the PKK are some examples of this toughening of the civil sphere. Faced with all this, there are elements of risk in the immediate future that could make it difficult to resume a solid process to seek a peaceful and negotiated solution to the Kurdish issue anytime soon. At the same time, there are windows of opportunity for dialogue based on previous approaches and the pressing need to avoid any further deterioration in the situation. As such, efforts must be redoubled inside and outside Turkey to establish new foundations for peace.

Armed violence in Yemen: a new and invisible Syria?

Yemen has been the scene of chronic armed conflicts in the last decade, with a series of dynamics of violence linked to the war that has pitted the Houthis against security forces in the northern part of the country since 2004, the constant and growing activity of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and, most recently, the crisis that led to the departure of President Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2011 as part of the wave of popular revolts against authoritarian regimes across the region. Yemen then began a bumpy transition that initially raised some expectations, although it was punctuated by periodic episodes of armed violence. The situation worsened markedly in late March 2015 when an international coalition led by Saudi Arabia decided to intervene to halt the progress of the Houthi militias, which had ousted the Yemeni transitional government at the start of the year. By late 2015, the toll of this new escalation was devastating: nearly 6,000 people had lost their lives due to the violence, half of them civilians, over one million people were displaced and the humanitarian situation was dramatic, with 80% of the population in need of assistance. Looking ahead to 2016, the situation in the country threatens to worsen due to the growing complexity of the armed conflict, the severe impact of the violence on the Yemeni population and the obstacles to finding a political solution to it. In late December 2015, a new effort to engage the warring sides in dialogue gave room for cautious hope amidst a crisis that looks increasingly similar to the war in Syria, but has received little international attention.

The background of this most recent escalation of violence in the country dates back to 2014, amidst a context of frustration with the progress of the transition process. The agreement sponsored by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 2011 managed to avoid a civil war at the time, but it did not lay down the foundations for tackling the underlying problems in Yemen, including the deterioration of the economic situation, corruption and rivalries between the country's elites.[29] The work of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) was applauded in some ways, but it also failed to provide an agreed solution on key issues, including the future structure of the state. In mid-2014, the government of President Abdo Rabbo Mansour Hadi (Saleh's former vice president) faced growing popular discontent due in part to the decision to suspend fuel subsidies, on which the Houthis capitalised to further expand their influence from the north. With the implicit collaboration of parts of the Yemeni security forces loyal to Saleh (in an alliance of convenience, since in previous years they had faced off in the context of the war), the Houthis took control of Sana'a in September. Shortly thereafter, in early 2015, they forced the fall of Hadi's government amidst disagreements over the federal divisions that were going to be enshrined the new Constitution. Despite the UN's attempts at mediation, the crisis worsened. The Houthis seized power and Hadi, who had been put under house arrest, fled to the southern city of Aden, denounced their actions as a coup d'état and went into exile in Saudi Arabia. In this context and faced with the southward advance of the Houthis, in late March Riyadh decided to intervene militarily in Yemen at the head of a coalition composed of the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan and Egypt and backed by countries like the United States and the United Kingdom.

Thereafter, the levels of violence intensified and the conflict became more complex resulting from the proliferation of armed groups, the influence of regional interests and the increasingly sectarian nature of the fighting. While the anti-Houthi coalition centred its strategy on an air campaign at first, the conflict later witnessed the growing participation of land forces from the countries of the alliance. During the summer, various coalition countries, including Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE and Sudan, deployed troops to reinforce the Yemeni soldiers loyal to Hadi, sent armoured vehicles imported from the West (both the United States and the United Kingdom have approved new transfers of weapons to Riyadh and Abu Dhabi) and managed to push back the Houthis from Aden.[60] Information revealed during the second half of 2015 indicates that hundreds of mercenaries were entering the country to reinforce the anti-Houthi front. At least 450 combatants of Latin American origin (most of them Colombian soldiers, given priority because of their experience in fighting against the FARC) were allegedly transported to Yemen by the UAE, introducing another volatile element to an already highly complex situation. In addition, Yemen is increasingly being considered a theatre of indirect confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iran in their dispute for regional hegemony. Although the stated intent of its intervention is to restore Hadi to power, Riyadh also considers the Houthis a threat and accuses them of being allies and pawns of Tehran. However, observers and analysts stress that the ties between Iran and the Houthis are neither tight nor operational (and not comparable to the links between Tehran and Hezbollah, for example), although they have gotten more intense during the conflict. The Houthis have approached Iran, but according to some analysts, the support is limited and focused especially on their potential as spoilers for the Saudis.[31]

The conflict and influence of the regional situation have also helped to intensify sectarian interpretations of the fighting between the different armed groups, an aspect not prevalent in armed violence in Yemen previously. As some analysts have emphasised, the differences between the Zaidis (Shia, predominantly in the north of the country) and Shafi'is (Sunnis, mostly in the centre, south and west) of Yemen are less pronounced than between Sunnis and Shia, but their

29. International Crisis Group, *Yemen at War,* Crisis Group Middle East Briefing no. 45, ICG, 27 March 2015.
30. Emily Hager and Mark Mazetti, "Emirates Secretly Sends Colombian Mercenaries to Yemen Fight", *The New York Times,* 25 November 2015.
31. Iba Abdo and Nick Grinstead, *Yemen: under fire, desperate for peace, Open Democracy*, 16 June 2015.

history of co-existence is being seen as threatened by the conflict.[32] AQAP is taking advantage of the turmoil to gain ground and consolidate its influence in the southwestern parts of the country and has been involved in battles against the Houthis. The ISIS branch in Yemen is trying to do the same. Created in late 2014, ISIS has tried to capitalise on the narrative of sectarianism. Throughout 2015, it claimed responsibility for unprecedentedly bloody attacks on mosques frequented by Houthis and the Zaidi community in Sana'a, in addition to other far-reaching actions like the murder of the governor of Aden.

The conflict has had a dire impact on the civilian population. Half of the 5,800 people killed in the escalation of violence from late March to early December were civilians, including hundreds of children, an outcome of the indiscriminate use of violence in populated areas. Dozens of people have been killed by mines and other explosive devices. Both sides have been denounced by human rights organisations for committing acts that constitute war crimes. More than 27,000 people have been injured and the healthcare infrastructure that remains standing is completely overwhelmed to meet the needs of the population. The conflict has even helped diseases like dengue fever and malaria to spread. NGOs and UN agencies warn that over 21 million people (80% of the Yemeni population) are in need of assistance and have complained that aid has been hampered by the naval and aerial blockade imposed on the country. The conflict has also forced 2.3 million people to abandon their homes, 120,000 of which have fled the country. As such, the intensification of the violence has helped to aggravate the already precarious situation of the population in the poorest country in the Arab World, with serious long-term consequences. In late 2015, UN estimates indicated that 1.8 million children had not attended school since March, 19 million people lacked access to safe water and sanitation and 7.6 million people were in a situation of severe food insecurity. The swift deterioration of the situation led the Red Cross to warn in September that after five months of conflict, Yemen presented a scenario similar to Syria after five years of war. Despite the seriousness of the situation, the emergency appeal launched half at mid-year had collected less than half the funds required.

The Red Cross warned in September that after five months of conflict, Yemen presented a scenario similar to Syria after five years of war

The prospects of halting the spiral of violence and redirecting the crisis by political means are complicated, given the precedents of mediation efforts and the constraints arising from the increasingly complex nature of the conflict. The various initiatives promoted by the UN to bring the parties to a political agreement have been unsuccessful so far. The agreement reached by the Houthis and Hadi's government after the capture of Sana'a in September 2014 was not respected by either side. Attempts to facilitate a rapprochement in January and February 2015 also failed. After the resignation of the UN special envoy for Yemen at the time, Jamal Benomar, his successor, Mauritanian diplomat Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, tried unsuccessfully to commit both sides to a ceasefire. The truces reached were either not respected, lasted a very short time or were preceded by an intensification of fighting. At a meeting in Geneva in June, the parties were unwilling to sit at the same table to negotiate and in September announcements of a new round of talks were cancelled at the last minute. The new round of negotiations in Switzerland in December seemed like a new opportunity. Amidst the international alarm over ISIS and given the stalemate in the war, Washington and London stepped up pressure on Hadi to adopt a less stringent position regarding implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2216. Approved in April with Russia abstaining, the resolution is considered sympathetic to Hadi and Riyadh's point of view. The text demands that the parties put an end to the violence and requires the Houthis to surrender the weapons seized from state arsenals and withdraw from the territories captured in the last year, including the capital, Sana'a. The Houthis have been willing to retreat, but demand that the negotiations address the political future of the country in a comprehensive manner.

The possibility that the negotiations include a land swap must overcome a series of obstacles, including the expected action of "spoilers" uninvolved in the negotiations, like AQAP and ISIS, and the fragility of the Yemeni alliances involved in the dispute, which may determine support for the talks if they do not address the demands of some groups (cooperation between the Houthis and Saleh's circle has been for convenience, but mistrust persists between both, while the pro-Hadi side includes actors like southern secessionist groups that came together to fight what they perceive to be a common enemy but feel no loyalty to the president). The influence of regional interests (especially Saudi Arabia and Iran), a possible freeze on concessions that may be interpreted as a gain for the other side and a situation in which Yemen becomes a bargaining chip as part of parallel negotiations in Syria must also be taken into account. In this context, various analysts warned that despite the greater diplomatic pressure, the round in December began with very limited expectations due to the deep divisions that persist. Still, some anticipated the possibility of reaching specific agreements like a long-term ceasefire, an exchange of prisoners, the lifting of the blockade and a framework for continuing the dialogue. Given the levels of violence and destruction in the country, any measure conducive to reducing the hostilities, death and suffering of the population would be considered progress.

32. ICG, op.cit.

The jihadist threat and its destabilising effects worldwide

In recent years, the *Alert!* report has drawn attention to the dynamics of radicalisation in the Middle East and the emergence of Islamic State (ISIS) in particular, first because of the progress made by the armed group in Syria and Iraq amidst a climate of instability in the region and then by its growing control of territories in both countries, which marked a turning point with the declaration of a caliphate in mid-2014. Since then, ISIS has become established as a new model for international jihadism and a competitor to al-Qaeda. It has been profiled as a player with a greater ability to act and a global reach, whether through many local armed groups that have pledged allegiance to ISIS for various reasons, mostly in countries in Africa and Asia, or through its involvement in actions perpetrated beyond these regions, as seen in the attacks in Paris in November 2015. In this context, many factors could influence an intensification of violence linked to the jihadist threat in the future. These include a more open struggle between ISIS and al-Qaeda, which may result in an increase in armed actions between both organisations, tending to raise the profile of their respective projects, a higher incidence of armed actions by ISIS militiamen returning to their countries of origin or acting as "lone wolves" (radicalised individuals with access to weapons and the desire to perpetrate attacks like in San Bernardino in the United States) and possible blowback from the international response to ISIS, which may result in an increase in the dynamics of radicalisation if it continues to favour the military option.

A more open struggle between ISIS and al-Qaeda may result in an increase in armed actions by both organisations aimed at raising the profile of their respective projects

The conflict between al-Qaeda and ISIS has dragged on for years, but has become increasingly explicit. The differences between both organisations date back to the time when what is now ISIS only operated in Iraq as a branch of al-Qaeda under the leadership of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Led by Osama bin Laden at the time, al-Qaeda reproached the Iraqi branch's strategies, especially its attacks against the Shia population because it placed a higher priority on focusing on the "outside enemy" and avoiding actions that could undermine support for it in the region. These disagreements continued after Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi assumed leadership of the Iraqi branch in a decision that was not discussed with the central leaders of the group and were exacerbated amidst the turmoil created by the war in Syria. Al-Baghdadi sent one of his lieutenants to take advantage of the chaos in the neighbouring country and his actions led to the formation of al-Nusra Front, which has taken on an increasingly important role. The Iraqi branch unilaterally declared its merger with al-Nusra Front in 2013, but al-Nusra Front denied any such union and insisted that it should be considered al-Qaeda's branch in Syria. The decision of al-Qaeda's central leadership (headed by Ayman al-Zawahiri after the death of Bin Laden) to support al-Nusra Front's position and reject the merger marked their break with al-Baghdadi's group in early 2014. This break was confirmed by subsequent armed clashes between al-Nusra Front and ISIS militiamen and, according to some sources, by ISIS' murder of the emissary sent by al-Zawahiri to mediate in the dispute.[33]

ISIS has been eclipsing al-Qaeda thanks to its conquests in Iraq and Syria, its greater financial resources (it is currently the richest armed group in the world) and its ability to attract recruits, partly by the use of propaganda and new technologies to co-opt and promote its actions, which receive high levels of media coverage. Some analysts have also stated that a generational difference playing against al-Qaeda's leadership and al-Zawahiri's lack of charisma and authority (compared to Bin Laden) may have favoured the split, described by some as a "coup d'état" from within al-Qaeda.[34] In its media statements, ISIS has not been shy to accuse some jihadist ideologues that inspired al-Qaeda and now criticise ISIS for murdering Muslims and "corrupting" jihad of conspiracy against the caliphate.[35]

In this context, various shows of loyalty to ISIS have been made by armed groups in recent years, some of them former supporters of al-Qaeda, in countries like Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Afghanistan and Nigeria. The diverse motives for this alignment would merit particular analysis in each case,[36] although a combination of ideological affinity, the search for funding, logistics support, media exposure and simply getting closer to what seems like the most powerful jihadist movement in the world are common to them. Some of these organisations have adopted aspects of the modus operandi that has brought fame to ISIS and have declared their areas of influence to be the new "provinces" of the caliphate. This is the case with Ansar Beit al-Maqdis in Egypt, which changed its name to Sinai Province in late 2014. The group has maintained its attacks against the Egyptian security forces, but has also claimed responsibility for actions like the attack on a Russian plane that killed over 200 people in October 2015. In Libya, the main factions of Ansar al-Sharia, initially related to al-Qaeda, decided to join ISIS and announced the establishment of Barqa (Cyrenaica). During 2015, ISIS in Libya claimed responsibility for bomb attacks, beheaded around 20 Egyptian Copts and led growing activity in Sirte and Derna, where it has conducted crucifixions. Due to its geographical proximity, jihadist activity in Libya generates special concern in Europe.

33. Shiv Malik et al., "How ISIS crippled al-Qaida", *The Guardian*, 10 June 2015.
34. Ibid.
35. Al-Qaeda also aspires to establish a caliphate in the long term, but does not yet believe that conditions are suitable for doing so.
36. See "Mali: jihadist group activities threaten stability" in this chapter.

One of the most recent additions to the allies of ISIS is Boko Haram (BH), which received aid from al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in the past. Considered by some analysts as the most lethal armed group in the world, BH proclaimed West Africa Province. In turn, ISIS is urging its African supporters who cannot reach Iraq or Syria to join the ranks of BH.[37]

Amidst these movements in global jihadism, groups like AQIM, which operates in Algeria and the Sahel, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), active in Yemen, and al-Shabaab, which fights in Somalia, have demonstrated loyalty to al-Qaeda's central leadership. However, they have had to deal with dissident factions and new armed actors supportive of ISIS in their areas of influence, like Jund al-Khilafa in Algeria and the new branch of ISIS in Yemen, which have carried out unprecedented attacks on Shia mosques. Supporters of AQIM and AQAP have also claimed responsibility for high-profile actions like the attacks in Paris against Charlie Hebdo in early 2015 (two of the perpetrators had ties to al-Qaeda in Yemen[38]) and the attack on a hotel in Bamako in late November. Amidst the commotion caused by successive ISIS attacks in Sinai, Lebanon and Paris in a span of just 15 days, the attack in Mali was interpreted as a call for attention by supporters of al-Qaeda to emphasise that the group remained relevant and encouraged discussions in jihadist circles about which of the two groups was doing greater service to the cause.[39] It also heightened concern about the foreseeable lethal effects of greater competition between al-Qaeda and ISIS worldwide, since their dispute over influence and visibility could lead groups loyal to either project to escalate their actions while pursuing their own local agendas.

Moreover, as seen in 2015, attacks perpetrated by jihadists radicalised in their countries of origin may continue, whether or not they receive help from militia fighters who have returned from places like Syria and Iraq. Evidence of this is provided by the attacks in Paris in November (some of the assailants had returned from Syria) and the attacks in Tunisia against the Bardo Museum in March, in Sousse in June and against the presidential guard in November. Given its experience, Tunisia fears the arrival of militiamen trained in neighbouring Libya and the return of over 3,000 Tunisians that have left the country to join jihadist activities in the Middle East. Both al-Qaeda and ISIS have called for "lone wolf" jihadist attacks against targets in the West. The easy access of weapons in many countries could encourage attacks similar to the one in San Bernardino (California), claimed by a couple that had pledged loyalty to ISIS through Facebook.

The dynamics of radicalisation may also be favoured by the effects of the global response to this phenomenon, and to ISIS in particular, which so far has had a strong emphasis on the military and security dimension. Especially since the attacks in Paris, but also before, various analysts[40] have underscored the risks of a hasty response and over-reaction, which ISIS would welcome, and have warned of the consequences of an armed approach that reflects a lack of learning from earlier experiences (a new war against terrorism could be as big a failure as the first) and helps to feed ISIS' narrative and prophecies of a final battle between the forces of the caliphate and the infidels. In this respect, the priority should be to halt the polarisation, which is a challenge considering the rise of right-wing and xenophobic speech in Europe and the United States, taken to the limit of caricature by Republican candidate Donald Trump.

The international response requires greater coordination and a political strategy to assume a challenge that transcends borders and to which an approach focused on weapons cannot be an effective response. As has been demonstrated, arms trading has even helped to grow ISIS' stockpiles.[41] There must be greater agreement that the main problem lies in the conflicts and the power vacuum that have given rise to these types of armed groups, and that legitimate new governments must be set up in the areas most affected by the scourge, along with a determined commitment to support inclusive peace agreements. In this regard, alliances with repressive regimes that present themselves as guarantors against terrorism should be avoided, since they entail repeating the same mistakes as in the past. Likewise, non-violent responses to the phenomenon must intensify, such as controlling arms flows, blocking channels of financing, sanctions and embargoes, etc., and attention must be paid to the conditions that have favoured the radicalisation of thousands and thousands of people and to marginalisation that in may contexts could make any project that provides an opportunity for social advancement look attractive, including jihadism. In short, the problem requires a thoughtful, concerted and long-term perspective that has not yet characterised the international response to a phenomenon as complex as jihadism.

37. Jakkie Cilliers, *Violent Islamist extremism and terror in Africa*, ISS Paper 286, October 2015.
38. A third assailant in the attacks in Paris in January 2015 declared he was a follower of ISIS and showed support for the other two perpetrators, but there was no logistic coordination between both groups.
39. Anne Barnard and Neil MacFarquhar, "Paris and Mali Attacks Expose Lethal Qaeda-ISIS Rivalry", *The New York Times,* 20 November 2015.
40. For example, see Virginie Collombier, *Fighting the Islamic State in Libya: by political means first,* NOREF, March 2015, Joseph Bahout, *ISIS and Syria: What to Do – And Not Do – About It,* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 24 November 2015; David Rothkopf, "Our Reaction Is More Dangerous Than the Terrorists", *Foreign Policy,* 25 November 2015; Jean-Marie Guenenno, *The Problem with Coalition Air Strikes in Syria and The Dangers of a European War on Terror,* ICG, 15 September and 24 November 2015; Jane Kinnimot, *Europe Needs to Take an Holistic Approach to Tackling ISIS,* Chatham House, 25 November 2015.
41. Amnesty International, *Iraq: 'Islamic State' atrocities fuelled by decades of reckless arms trading*, AI, 8 December 2015.

Annex: Opportunities for peace and risk scenarios in previous years

Opportunities for Peace

2015

- Negotiations over the Iranian nuclear dossier: a renewed commitment to dialogue
- Sudan's National Dialogue, one of the last hopes for peace in the country
- The inclusion of the reduction of armed violence in the Post-2015 Agenda
- The confluence of global efforts against child recruitment
- Integrating peace and development: progress on the international agenda for gender equality

2014

- Iran and nuclear talks: an opportunity beyond the atomic dispute
- The Colombian Women's Truth and Memory Commission, a feminist approach to peacebuilding and recovering memory
- The peace process in Mindanao: inclusivity and a gender perspective
- West Papua: the diplomatic internationalisation of a forgotten conflict
- Serbia and Kosovo, from antagonism to the pragmatic normalisation of relations
- The European Court of Human Rights and Chechnya: though limited, the only recourse to justice
- The defeat of the armed group M23, a new opportunity for peace in the Great Lakes region

2013

- Georgia: a new post-election boost for relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia?
- A peace agreement for Nagaland
- The signing of a peace agreement between the government of the Philippines and the MILF in Mindanao
- Senegal: prospects of a negotiated outcome to the conflict in Casamance
- Colombia: towards a peace agreement with the guerrillas
- A strong treaty to control the arms trade: a second attempt?
- Young people: an engine for change and dialogue in contexts of conflict?

2012

- The Arab Spring and the Tunisian way
- Myanmar: an opportunity for democratic reforms and a transformation of the conflict
- Serbia, Kosovo and Northern Kosovo: the challenge of cooperation
- The cessation of hostilities in the border dispute between Thailand and Cambodia
- New agreements for the consolidation of peace in Nepal
- The dialogue on Transdniestria
- The Arms Trade Treaty and the new challenges of disarmament

2011

- UN Women, the New Body for the Defence of Gender Equity
- The United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons
- Self-Determination Referendum in Southern Sudan
- An Opportunity for Dialogue in Colombia
- Peace Processes in the State of Assam (India)
- The Resumption of Peace Talks in the Philippines
- The Achievement of Lasting Peace in the Basque Country

2010

- Ten years of Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security
- The International Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
- The African Convention on the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons
- Initiative to resolve the Kurdish question in Turkey
- Peace negotiations in the Niger Delta (Nigeria)

2009

- The Geneva Declaration: a reduction in armed violence for 2015
- The peace agreement in Burundi
- The Inclusive Political Dialogue in Central African Republic
- Openness for peace in Colombia
- The consolidation of peace in Nepal
- The negotiations for reunifying Cyprus
- The inclusion of Syria into the regional peace picture
- The application of the EU's Common Position on arms trade
- The closure of Guantanamo as a turning point on the present human rights crisis
- Resolution 1820 on sexual violence as a weapon of war

2008

- The peace process in northern Uganda
- The implementation of the peace agreement in Côte d'Ivoire
- The signing of the peace agreement in the southern Philippines
- The consolidation of the transition process in Haiti
- The creation of a Truth Commission and International Criminal Court in Burundi
- The process of dialogue and transition for Myanmar
- The signing of an international treaty for the banning of cluster bombs
- The impact of the United Nations Declaration on indigenous peoples in the resolution of conflicts

Risk scenarios

2015

- The threat of ISIS in Iraq and Syria: risks for human security and impacts on the region
- Libya: a land of fragmentation, institutional fragility, regional disputes and mounting violence
- The escalation of violence in the Chinese region of Xinjiang
- Urban violence in Pakistan: Peshawar, Quetta and Karachi, scenarios of conflict and tension
- The war in Ukraine: few prospects of a solution
- Haiti: the risk of a power vacuum and a worsening political and social crisis
- The expansion of al-Shabaab into Kenya: at the doors of a new armed conflict

2014

- Global challenge: forced displacement of population at the worst level since the 1990s
- Iraq: Devastating toll of a decade of war amidst growing turmoil
- Internationalisation and radicalisation of the conflict in Syria and its destabilising regional impact
- Eritrea facing a possible implosion of the state with unforeseeable consequences
- Thailand: a decade of protests and an uncertain future
- Increasing violence in the Chinese province of Xinjiang
- The dispute between China and Japan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and the struggle for power in East Asia
- Turkey-PKK talks: internal Turkish crisis and regional instability

2013

- Dagestan, between militarisation and an acute human rights crisis
- An uncertain future in Myanmar?

- Complex challenges 15 years on from the Tajikistan peace agreement
- The possible resumption of the armed conflict between the government and the MNLF in the south of the Philippines
- Self-immolations in Tibet, a symptom of desperation
- The possible reconstitution of the army in Haiti
- Unmanned aerial vehicles: the challenges of remote-controlled warfare
- The pending closure of Guantanamo
- Kenya, faced with growing instability in 2013
- Rwanda and the FDLR, cause and consequence of the instability in the Great Lakes
- Violence and the Syrian forced displacement crisis
- The crisis in Mali and security challenges in the Sahel

The Escola de Cultura de Pau (School for a Culture of Peace, hereinafter ECP) is an academic peace research institution located at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. It was created in 1999 with the aim of promoting the culture of peace through research, parallel diplomacy, training and awareness generating activities. Its main scope of action includes analysing conflicts, peace processes, gender, human rights and transnational justice, and education for peace.

The fields of action of the Escola de Cultura de Pau are:

- Research. Its main areas of research include armed conflicts and socio-political crises, peace processes, human rights and transitional justice, the gender dimension in conflict and peacebuilding, and peace education.

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- Consultancy services. The ECP carries out a variety of consultancy services for national and international institutions.

- Teaching and training. ECP staff gives lectures in postgraduate and graduate courses in several universities, including its own Graduate Diploma on Culture of Peace at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. It also provides training sessions on specific issues, including conflict sensitivity and peace education.

- Advocacy and awareness-raising. Initiatives include activities addressed to the Spanish and Catalan society, including contributions to the media.

ecp escola de cultura de pau

Plaça del Coneixement
Parc de Recerca, Edifici MRA,
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
08193 Bellaterra (Spain)

Tel: +34 93 586 88 42
Fax: +34 93 581 32 94

pr.conflictes.escolapau@uab.cat
http://escolapau.uab.cat

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