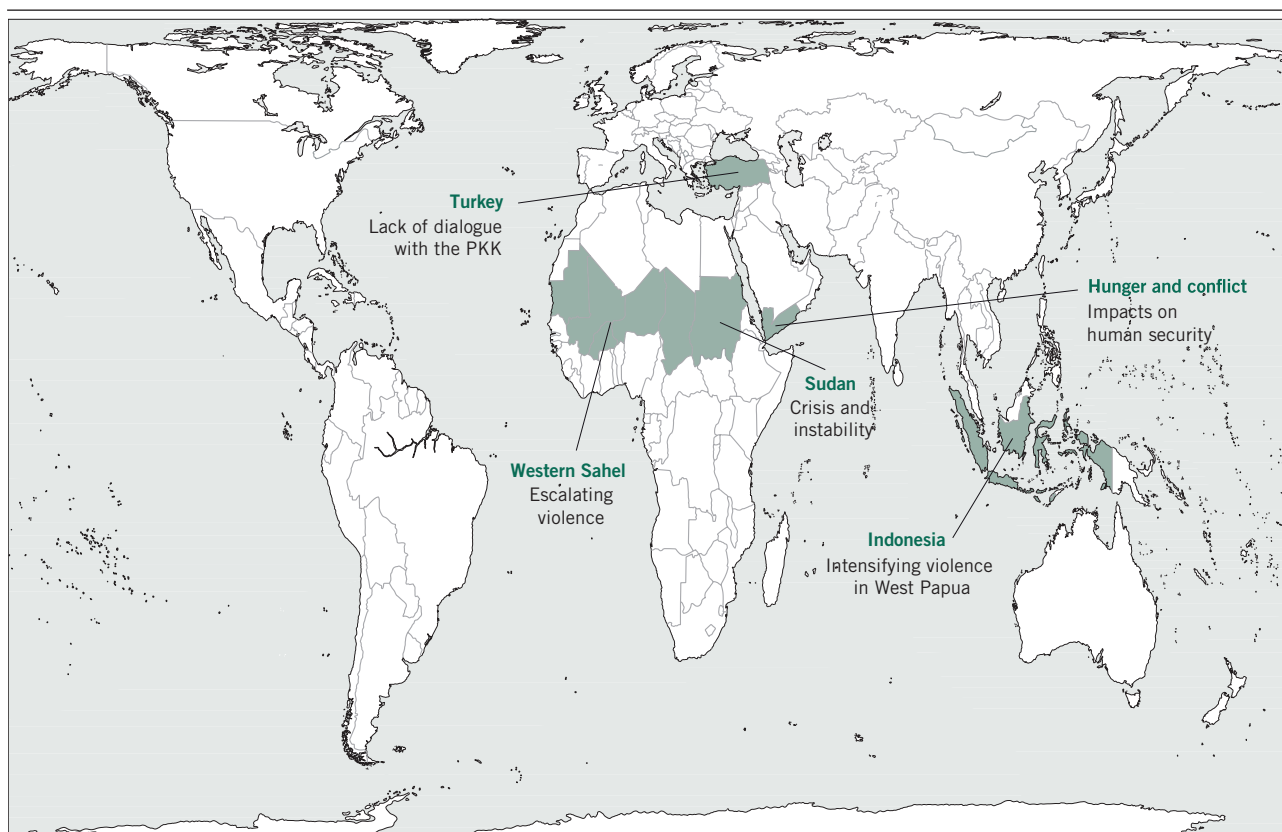# 5. Risk scenarios for 2019

Drawing on the analysis of the contexts of armed conflict and socio-political crisis in 2018, in this chapter the School for a Culture of Peace identifies five scenarios that, due to their conditions and dynamics, may worsen and become a focus of greater instability and violence during 2019. The risk scenarios for 2019 refer to the escalation of violence in the Western Sahel region, to the effects of the political and economic crisis in the scenarios of instability in Sudan, to the increase in violence in the Indonesian region of West Papua 50 years after the failed referendum on self-determination, to the risks stemming from the lack of dialogue in the conflict between Turkey and the PKK and to the serious impact that hunger and conflict have on human security.

Map 5.1. **Risk scenarios for 2019**

Turkey
Lack of dialogue
with the PKK

Hunger and conflict
Impacts on
human security

Sudan
Crisis and
instability

Western Sahel
Escalating
violence

Indonesia
Intensifying violence
in West Papua

5.1. Escalation of violence and instability in Cameroon

Despite several positive changes that have taken place in the different political arenas in the Western Sahel region (the peace process that is trying to resolve the armed conflict in Mali; the improvement of the political situation in Burkina Faso with the arrival of Roch Marc Christian Kaboré in 2015, who put an end to the transition after the fall of the authoritarian President Blaise Compaoré; and Niger's return to civilian rule in 2011 after the coup d'état in 2009), in recent years and especially in 2018, the region has faced a rise in political violence with many ramifications and expressions of intercommunal violence and criminality that is putting the different countries and populations of the region in check. The militarisation of the region, considered the "new frontier in the global fight against terrorism", including the deployment of regional and international initiatives, may have serious consequences for civilians and might not resolve the fundamental issues that lie at the roots of the conflict in the area.

Various analysts have pointed to a surge in regional violence, which at first was linked to the spread of the activities of armed groups from Mali to the border with Niger and Burkina Faso, and of the Nigerian armed group Boko Haram towards Niger (Diffa region) as part of the expansion of its activities in the Lake Chad region. Later, other sources of instability were identified far from these areas that had their own agency. Thus, the Africa Center for Strategic Studies[1] conducted a study revealing the increase in violence over time, both regard to its geographical spread and to the number of actors perpetrating it. The number of violent incidents linked to jihadist armed groups has doubled every year since 2016 (90 in 2016, 194 in 2017 and 465 in 2018), in line with the casualties linked to them (218 in 2016, 529 in 2017 and 1,100 in 2018). Attacks against civilians have also multiplied, going from 18 in 2016 to 39 in 2017 and 160 in 2018. Although Mali continued to be the main focal point of the violence, accounting for 64% of the attacks in the Sahel, the remaining 36% were committed in Burkina Faso and Niger. Burkina Faso has gone from being hit by three insurgent attacks in 2015 to 12 in 2016, 29 in 2017 and 137 in 2018. Half the insurgent attacks in the region are linked to the coalition of well-known groups like the Group to Support Islam and Muslims (GSIM, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin), created in March 2017; the Macina Liberation Front (FLM), which acted together with the GSIM in more than 40% of the insurgent attacks; and two new groups, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and Ansaroul Islam, which were implicated in 26% and

The security approach could end up stoking grievances in the Western Sahel region, historically affected by high rates of underdevelopment, and aggravate the humanitarian situation there

15%, respectively, of the insurgent attacks committed in the region. The groups were spread geographically across four major theatres: the GSIM in central and northern Mali; Ansaroul Islam in the area of Djibo, in Burkina Faso; ISGS on the border between Niger and Mali; and both the GSIM and ISGS in eastern Burkina Faso. While there were four groups operating in Mali in 2012 (the MNLA, Ansar Dine, MUJAO, AQIM), there are currently over 10 active armed groups in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, and the violence in 2018 exceeded all violent incidents that took place from 2009 to 2015 combined. The soaring violence could also be due to competition between ISIS and al-Qaeda for leadership in the area, according to various analysts.[2]

This increase in insurgent activity has been accompanied by the creation of regional missions and the presence of foreign forces to confront them. In 2017, the G5 Sahel Joint Force was launched, composed of around 5,000 troops from Mali, Chad, Niger, Mauritania and Burkina Faso. It was intended to be operational during the first half of 2018. However, it suffered several military setbacks as well as a lack of foreseeable financing and shortcomings in terms of capabilities and equipment, which put a brake on its operations. In September, Mali and Burkina Faso asked the UN Security Council to entrust a mandate to the Joint Force under Chapter VII to ensure continued funding and support. Also in 2017, a Joint Task Force (JTF) composed of members from Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger was set up for the Liptako-Gourma region, comprising an area of 370,000 km[2] between the three countries. These operations include the French military Operation Barkhane, consisting of 4,500 soldiers, which has been active since 2014 (the previous operation, Serval, which began in 2013, centred its activities in Mali).[3]

In addition to the UN mission (MINUSMA), the foreign presence has expanded to include the United States, Germany, Canada and Italy. In April, Niger hosted US-sponsored military exercises for Operation Flintlock, involving 1,900 soldiers from around 20 countries. The United States already has a permanent military presence throughout the Sahel, with the exception of Eritrea and Sudan, as part of counter-terrorism initiatives it developed after 9/11 in Africa, under the mandate of AFRICOM.

According to several analysts, there are three reasons for this large military presence: to assist in the fight against terrorism, to prevent migration to Europe and to protect the national interests of foreign powers. Its activities include training, counter-insurgency actions (also through

---

1. Africa Center for Strategic Studies, *The Complex and Growing Threat of Militant Islamist Groups in the Sahel*, 15 February 2019.
2. Among other sources, see, Abu al-Maali, Mohammed Mahmoud, *The Competition between al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in the Sahel and Sahara*, Al Jazeera Centre for Studies and al-Dar al-Arabi lil-Ulum, 2017; Cherbib, Hamsa, *Jihadism in the Sahel: Exploiting Local Disorders*; IEMED Mediterranean Yearbook, 2018.
3. France has been militarily active in the Sahel since 1983, with Operation Manta (in Chad), the forerunner of Operation Épervier (1986), which preceded Operation Serval (which took place in Mali). Operation Manta is considered the largest French military operation since the Algerian War.

the use of drones), the construction of military bases and intelligence gathering. Although the governments of the region have welcomed the arrival of foreign troops as part of their struggle against armed groups with jihadist agendas, it is debatable whether these operations have achieved their objective, given the expansion of insurgent activity. On the contrary, they could be having a negative impact. In Niger, the local population has begun to reject the presence of foreign troops due to the militarisation of public life and the restriction of their freedoms, resulting in demonstrations that have been repressed by the security forces, thereby increasing rejection of the government, which according to various analysts is also seeking to bolster its power via non-democratic mechanisms. Civilians in Burkina Faso came out to protest the authorities' failure in managing the situation. Moreover, as the South African think tank ISS has pointed out, the restriction of movement (including trucks and motorcycles) imposed under the state of emergency in parts of all three countries, which is aimed at halting cross-border illegal trafficking and the supply of weapons to the armed groups, has also interrupted commercial activities, aggravating the economic situation in the region and increasing the population's vulnerability. This has led to hikes in the prices of products, negatively affecting producers who cannot move their goods to market, which has also increased the risk of food insecurity and hindered humanitarian organisations' access to the affected areas.

In the end, this security approach could end up stoking grievances in a region affected by high rates of underdevelopment and whose political, economic and social marginalisation lies at the root of its historical conflicts. These military actions, which are not proving effective in reducing violence, have also been pursued without consulting local populations. According to ISS, this has increased popular rejection of foreign intervention, since locals are caught between the military forces and the insurgents. In conclusion, the current strategy may be counterproductive in the short and long term, does not effectively help to reduce violence, proposes no substantive solutions to the structural problems causing the violence and may aggravate the consequences for the civilian population.

5.2. The effects of the political and economic crisis on the scenarios of instability in Sudan

June 2019 marks the 30th anniversary of Omar al-Bashir's ascent to power in Sudan through a coup that overthrew the elected government led by Prime Minister Sadeq al-Mahdi. Since then, the country has been ruled by the National Congress Party, which has erected an autocratic regime based on the militarisation of the state. During 2018, the country faced a bifurcated scenario coupling the reduction in the intensity of violence in the regions of Darfur (west) and South Kordofan and Blue Nile (south) with a worsening nationwide economic and political crisis that unleashed massive popular protests throughout the year that hit their high point in December and continued into early 2019. All of the above augurs a year that will be marked by uncertainty about whether Omar al-Bashir's regime can remain in power and in which, the way the different scenarios develop, will be fundamental.

First, the crisis in Darfur, whose origins date back to 2003, has been characterised in recent years by a drop in violence in much of the region due to different factors: progress in the negotiating process, the mediating role of the international and national community, the fatigue of the parties and the unilateral cessation of hostilities decreed both by the government and the main Darfuri rebel groups (the Justice and Equality Movement [JEM] and the Sudan Liberation Movement/Minni Minnawi faction [SLM-MM]). This has made progress in the peace talks possible, including the signing in late 2018 of a pre-negotiation agreement to resume the 2006 Doha agreements between the government and the rebel groups SLA-MM and JEM.[4] In turn, the decline in violence also made it possible to reduce and reconfigure the joint AU and UN peacekeeping mission in the country, UNAMID, which, based on UN Security Council Resolutions 2363 and 2429, closed 10 bases in the country and cut its deployed military and police personnel almost by half. However, there are some risk scenarios that could cause a return to violence. Indeed, although the intensity of the clashes has subsided, they have not ended. The fighting is concentrated mainly in the Jebel Marra area,[5] where SLA rebel forces led by Abdel Wahid (SLA-AW) have continued their struggle due to their exclusion from the peace talks. This led to heavy fighting between the rebellion and the government forces and their related militias in 2018, mainly through the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which are integrated into the state military structure. The clashes caused deterioration in the security situation and forcibly displaced people. Undoubtedly, the most pressing risk for 2019 is represented by the paramilitary RSF's announcement to launch a final offensive against the rebels at the beginning of the year, anticipating a resurgence in the fighting. Although UNAMID has strengthened its presence in Jebel Marra, its lower operational capacity should be considered in future scenarios of resurging violence. The failure to bring all the armed actors to the negotiating table, as has happened at other times, is another risk, not only for ending the situation of insecurity, but also for effectively implementing any measure adopted.

Second, the armed conflict pitting the government against the rebel forces of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) in the southern regions of South Kordofan and Blue Nile has also witnessed a decline in violence over the past few years, with unilateral ceasefires on both sides. This has enabled the resumption of peace talks that had been deadlocked since October 2016.[6] However, there are also some risk factors to take into account. Furthermore, the growing fragmentation of the SPLM-N, whose internal struggles led to its split in 2017, resulting in one faction led by Abdelaziz al-Hilu and the other under the command of Malik Agar, makes resolving the conflict difficult, in part due to the initial exclusion of the faction headed by Agar from the peace talks. Meanwhile, the RSF's presence and attacks in the area remain a source of insecurity and instability. Finally, the lack of agreement on humanitarian access to the Two Areas perpetuates this insecurity and the humanitarian crisis threatening civilians there.

Third, the worsening economic and political crisis in 2018 has highlighted the instability of Omar al-Bashir's regime and the people's growing discontent and discomfort. The political tension centred around two episodes at the beginning and end of the year, and originated in the structural adjustment plan put in place by the Sudanese government to dispel the IMF's doubts about the country's economic stability. As part of the economic adjustment measures, Khartoum eliminated the flour subsidy, which tripled the price of bread, increasing the vulnerability of the poorest people in the country. This sparked major public demonstrations in January that were harshly repressed by the security forces, with hundreds of detainees reported. The economic situation worsened throughout the year and was further aggravated by the fuel crisis. Khartoum took different political steps to contain the situation, starting with reshuffling the cabinet and subsequently dissolving it; reducing the number of MPs and the number of ministries; boosting subnational representation in the legislative chamber, etc. Although these demonstrations tapered off during the year, parliamentary approval of the constitutional amendment submitted by the ruling party to extend presidential term limits in early December 2018 triggered a new wave of popular protests. These began on 19 December in the northeastern city of Atbara and quickly spread throughout the country. Though at first they protested the elimination of the flour subsidy and the consequences of the economic crisis, by the end of

---

4. These future negotiations will be based on the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD), signed in 2006. See the summary on Sudan (Darfur) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace talks in focus 2019. Report on trends and scenarios.* Icaria, 2019.
5. See the summary on Sudan (Darfur) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).
6. See the summary on Sudan (South Kordofan and Blue Nile) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).

the year they had expanded and taken on a marked anti-Bashir tone, demanding his resignation. Once again the government responded with a crackdown, using live ammunition against the protestors that left at least 37 people dead at the year's end. The government also took other measures, such as shutting down the Internet and several newspapers and schools, including universities, decreeing a state of emergency for the entirety of 2019.[7]

All this has pushed the country to a turning point whose consequences will depend on the Sudanese regime's strategies of repression or dialogue, which will undoubtedly mark its future development. In this context, there are different factors to consider. The first is the open negotiating process between Khartoum and Washington to normalise their diplomatic relations and remove Sudan from the list of countries that sponsor terrorism. The US State Department has demanded progress from the al-Bashir government in six different areas, including the peaceful resolution of the armed conflicts in the country, the improvement of the human rights situation and measures that may shape

The situation in Sudan augurs a year that will be marked by uncertainty about whether Omar a-Bashir's regime can remain in power and in which the way the different scenarios develop will be fundamental

how the regime responds to the growing social discontent. The second involves the ICC's arrest warrant for al-Bashir, which accuses him of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity and may present a major obstacle, both in measuring his response and in relation to encouraging him to stay in power in an attempt to guarantee his impunity, as has happened so far. The third is the evolution of the peace negotiations in the war-torn regions, which can be substantial not only in prolonging or ending the violence in the three areas, but also in relation to their effect on national dynamics. The fourth is the potential for a contagious effect in Sudan due to the various regional crises that remain active, especially in South Sudan, the Central African Republic and Ethiopia, as well as the development of bilateral relations between the Sudanese government and neighbouring countries, as there were significant tensions between the governments of Egypt and Ethiopia during 2018. The fifth and final factor to consider is the evolution of popular protests in the country and the ability of the different national political and social opposition groups and movements to express themselves.

---

7.   See the summary on Sudan in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises)

5.3. Rising violence in West Papua, 50 years after the failed referendum on self-determination

Tension increased significantly in the Indonesian region of Papua at the end of 2018 after the killing of between 17 and 31 people (mostly workers who were building a road) and the subsequent start of a counterinsurgency campaign in which the Indonesian Armed Forces was accused of using air strikes and chemical weapons. Although both sides have denied or minimised their responsibility in the aforementioned episodes of violence, with the Indonesian Army denying that it had used chemical weapons and the OPM claiming that the people killed were soldiers, and not civilians, at the beginning of 2019 the international community's concern grew regarding the human rights situation in West Papua, as attested by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, in her trip to West Papua to learn about the situation first-hand.

In addition to the seriousness of the aforementioned episodes of violence, there are several reasons to pay attention to developments in West Papua. The first of these is the fact that the year 2019 marks the 50th anniversary of the referendum (called the Act of Free Choice) that sanctioned the annexation of the Papua region by Indonesia. Some NGOs and church groups claim that between 300,000 and 500,000 people have lost their lives since then. Both the Papuan independence movement and many human rights organisations have stated that even though the referendum was supervised by the United Nations, it lacked legitimacy because only 1,000 people selected by the dictatorship of General Suharto participated in it. They think that West Papua has not exercised its right of self-determination and that it is a region still pending decolonisation. It is very likely that the event will provide the Papuan nationalist movement and those countries or organisations that advocate the self-determination of West Papua with a very good opportunity to make their demands visible on an international scale. In this regard, the government of Vanuatu (undoubtedly the most proactive country in defending the self-determination of the Papuan people) has launched an ambitious diplomatic campaign to gain as much support as possible to submit a motion for a resolution to the General Assembly of the United Nations of 2019 that calls for holding a new referendum in West Papua and including it on the UN list of territories pending decolonisation. Bachelet also delivered a petition signed by 1.8 million people (a very significant proportion of the Papuan population) requesting an internationally supervised vote on independence for Papua.

Furthermore, the upcoming presidential election in April, is also a source of uncertainty. There are two reasons for this. The first is because levels of violence have been high around previous elections, especially in West Papua. The second is due to the possibility that one of the two candidates with the best chances to win, the retired General Prabowo Subianto, may prevail. Human rights organisations have repeatedly

The 50th anniversary of the referendum that sanctioned the annexation of Papua by Indonesia may provide the Papuan independence movement with a good opportunity to make its demands visible

called for investigations into the many allegations of rights violations committed by Prabowo, who was the son-in-law of former dictator Suharto. These accusations include his alleged participation in a massacre of almost 300 civilians in East Timor in the 1980s, in the kidnapping and torture of 23 pro-democracy activists in the midst of the transitional crisis after the Suharto regime and the orchestration of protests in 1998 that caused the deaths of over 1,000 people and the rape of 168 women. Prabowo, who was responsible for the Indonesian Army's special forces, later led an operation to rescue 11 scientists kidnapped by the OPM in Papua that ended with the deaths of several people and accusations of human rights violations. Although none of these charges have been proven and Prabowo has categorically denied them all, the National Human Rights Commission formally requested that he be prosecuted and the US government denied him a visa to enter the country in the year 2000. The other main contender in the presidential elections, incumbent President Joko Widodo, began his term in 2014 promising a new approach towards Papua, one more conciliatory and respectful of human rights, but by the close of 2018, one of the main human rights organisations in the country, Kontras, indicated that the human rights situation had not improved substantially since 2014, criticised the restrictions on foreign media access to the region and stated that some of the main problems are conflicts between indigenous populations and businesses over land. Some have warned that one of Widodo's strategies to improve the region's development included the authorisation of major projects (such as the construction of a 4,600-kilometer highway) and the promotion and protection of large concessions to foreign companies, such as the mining company Freeport McMoran and British Petroleum.

If Prabowo wins, some analysts have predicted more tension in the relationship between the governments of China and Indonesia, which has already experienced some disagreements in recent times as a result of their territorial claims in the South China Sea, protests in Indonesia over Beijing's treatment of the Uighur Muslim minority and the impact that the growing presence and influence of Islamic conservatism (especially in Prabowo's candidacy) can have on the community of Chinese descent in Indonesia. According to some media sources, OPM leaders have stressed the possibility of Beijing's support for their cause. From a geopolitical perspective, China's approach to the strategy already pursued by some Pacific islands, which consists of demanding a referendum of self-determination and involving the United Nations in resolving the conflict, could significantly boost its influence in a region that is not only abundant in natural resources, but is also geo-strategically important for the country because it would provide a passage and navigation route between the Indian and Pacific Oceans and would serve as a base of support for Beijing's policy in the South China Sea, one of the most important lines of current Chinese foreign policy.

5.4. Turkey and the PKK: the risks of a conflict with no scenarios of dialogue

Since the failed peace process between Turkey and the PKK crashed in 2015, the prospects for a solution to this armed conflict over the status and political, cultural and linguistic rights of the Kurdish minority in Turkey have seemed to move further and further away. Active since 1984, the conflict has claimed more than 40,000 lives, mostly of Kurds, and produced high levels of trauma. The deterioration of the domestic situation in recent years, the military strengthening of the actors involved and the regional dynamics are just a few factors adding to the risk of destabilisation.

The general situation in Turkey has undergone serious drift in recent years, including the deterioration of the human rights situation and the erosion of the rule of law under the state of emergency. As denounced by the UN,[8] this has included human rights violations against hundreds of thousands of people, including arbitrary deprivation of the right to work and of the freedom of movement, torture, mistreatment and arbitrary detention. In the Kurdish areas of Turkey, this deterioration has included killings, torture, violence against women, the excessive use of force, the destruction of homes and cultural heritage, impediments to access to emergency medical care, potable water and means of sustenance, serious restrictions on freedom of expression and others. Imposed after the failed coup d'état of 2016, the state of emergency was lifted in 2018, but replaced by a reform of the antiterrorist law that establishes new restrictions. It increases the period of police detention without charges and extends the grounds for restricting demonstrations and the powers of provincial governors, among other aspects, with repercussions for the conflict over the Kurdish issue.

Overall, the political and social space for the Kurdish population has shrank significantly, as they are actively mobilised around their identity and demand for cultural, linguistic rights, decentralisation and guarantees of political participation. By early 2019, more than 5,000 members of the pro-Kurdish HDP party remained in prison, including its leaders, and more than 2,000 NGOs and 200 media outlets, many of them Kurdish, had been banned. In contrast, the central government and the office of the presidency have enhanced their power, taking measures such as the aforementioned antiterrorist reform and changing to a presidential regime after the constitutional referendum of 2017, which reduced powers of parliamentary control. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, re-elected in 2018, is consolidating his power, with no indications for now that his hegemony and political leadership will be used to reinvigorate new peace negotiations after the previous processes failed on his watch. Various factors are involved in this decision, including the influence exerted by the political partner of the AKP, the Turkish ultranationalist MHP, which advocates a hard-line policy against the Kurdish movement, including political and social actors, and the total rejection of dialogue. The local elections in Turkey in March 2019 are the last in the recent cycle of elections and open a new scenario in the struggle for political control.

Another risk factor is the military strengthening of Turkey and the PKK. Turkey went from spending 15.412 billion dollars on the military in 2015 (1.8% of GDP), the year when the peace process ended, to 19.58 billion in 2017 (2.2% of GDP). In recent years, Ankara has justified the rise in defence spending on the need to deal with security threats and to increase its deterrent capacity. The increase in military spending has been accompanied by a boost to the Turkish defence industry for the purpose of reducing external dependence. Meanwhile, the PKK has increased its potential access to more sophisticated weapons due to regional dynamics and the war in Syria. In both cases, rearmament and greater access to weapons increases the risks of instability and has serious impacts on civilians. Thus, the regional context constitutes another risk factor. The conflict in Syria, with its many different dimensions and actors, is another theatre where the war between Turkey and the PKK is currently being waged. The expansion into Syria of the Kurdish YPG forces, the predominant actor of the SDF coalition, which is supported by the US in its campaign against ISIS and controls extensive territory where it implements a de facto self-government in areas bordering Turkey, is viewed by Ankara as a threat to its national security. The PKK and the YPG have historically been linked since the YPG was created in 2004. Turkey considers them one and the same and analysts have pointed to the PKK's influence in the leadership of the YPG.[9] The United States has delivered weapons and military equipment to the YPG as part of the war in Syria, becoming a key ally. Turkey strongly criticises US support for the YPG, warning of the risks of US weapons being used by the PKK against Turkey. In this context, Turkey's military operations on Syrian soil, its threats to expand them to new areas in both Syria and Iraq and the intensification of its military siege of the PKK command in 2018[10] add uncertainty to the risks of further military drift in the region and in Turkey.

The accumulation of internal and regional factors currently weighing on Turkey, including those related to the deterioration of its domestic situation, a more sophisticated rearming of its actors in conflict, and the influence of the dynamics of the war in Syria, point to future risks of more violence in the conflict. At the same time, factors that may help to reduce those risks include the impossibility of a military victory, the risk of more indiscriminate impacts and the fatigue that this would cause among the population, the counterweight that the powers involved in Syria can exercise, the opportunities of the peace dividend for an economically depressed Turkey and the efforts of local and international actors mobilised for a negotiated solution in the country.

---

8.   OHCHR, *Report on the impact of the state of emergency on human rights in Turkey, including an update on the South-East. January – December 2017*, OHCHR, March 2018.

9.   International Crisis Group, *The PKK's Fateful Choice in Northern Syria*, Middle East Report No. 176, 4 May 2017.

10. See the summary on Turkey (southeast) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).

5.5. Hunger and conflict: challenges of a relationship with serious impacts on human security

A disturbing trend has recently been identified with regard to the situation of hunger in the world. The number of people affected by food insecurity had been falling despite the growing population, but in recent years this trend has reversed. Therefore, the 21st century has witnessed an increase in the total global population suffering from hunger. In 2016, this figure exceeded 815 million people, 37 million more than the previous year. Most of them lived in areas affected by conflict and violence. According to data from the UN World Food Programme (WFP), 60% of the more than 800 million people who suffered from chronic hunger in the world lived in countries in conflict. Various sources suggest that the rise in hunger in recent years is related to the impact of armed conflicts and warns of the challenges presented by the relationship between hunger and conflict, since both phenomena feed off each other: food insecurity can aggravate situations of conflict and violence and armed conflicts create conditions for growing food insecurity. Furthermore, in various current armed conflicts, hunger has been used systematically as a weapon of war.

The data collected by various United Nations agencies and programmes depict an alarming scenario. In the last decade, more than 80% of the resources requested by the UN for humanitarian aid were aimed at correcting the situation in conflict zones. According to the FAO's Global Report on Food Crises (2017), 10 of the 13 most serious humanitarian crises were conflict-related: Afghanistan, Burundi, the CAR, the DRC, Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen. The WFP notes that acute food insecurity has increased by 11% in recent years and can be largely attributed to the dynamics of conflict, violence and insecurity in places such as Myanmar, Nigeria, the DRC, South Sudan and Yemen. This organisation also stresses that 75% of girls and boys with stunted growth problems (122 million of a total of 155 million) live in countries affected by conflicts. Data from the WHO, meanwhile, indicate that people who live in areas with prolonged crises are 2.5 times more likely to suffer from severe malnutrition.

One of the most iconic current cases is that of Yemen. During 2018, images of Yemeni children affected by severe malnutrition circulated in international media, highlighting the impact of the armed conflict in the country, which has become the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. Even though it was already the poorest country in the Arab world before the escalation of violence in 2015, its population has become impoverished and affected by unpaid wages, while food prices have skyrocketed. Yemen is a net importer of goods and food (more than 80%). Consequently, Yemeni population has been directly affected by the blockade of its ports imposed by the military coalition led by Saudi Arabia, as well as by other practices such as the destruction of markets as part of many attacks on civilian targets. At the

Most of the people affected by hunger in the world lives in areas affected by conflicts, according to data from the UN World Food Programme

end of 2018, according to OCHA data, a total of 20 million Yemenis were in a situation of food insecurity, of which 10 million were suffering severe food insecurity, meaning that they were at risk of famine. Approximately 3.2 million people required treatment for severe malnutrition, including two million children under the age of five and one million pregnant and lactating women.

Syria is another case to be highlighted, considering the serious impact of the conflict in humanitarian terms, the systematic use of sieges against civilians and hunger as a weapon of war and many other practices that violate international humanitarian law. The conflict has forcibly displaced millions of people and has pushed more than 80% of the population under the poverty line. At the end of 2018 it was estimated that around 6.5 million people, or 33% of the population, were unable to obtain basic food to meet their needs. The conflict has had serious impacts on the agricultural sector and has turned Syria into a net food importer, when it was once one of the largest agricultural producers in the Middle East. Added to this are the direct consequences of the sieges used to force the surrender of adversaries, a practice used by various armed actors, but above all by the regime of Bashar Assad, which has been denounced by NGOs and the UN during the course of the conflict and constitutes a war crime. Another particularly serious case was that of South Sudan, where violence and food shortages put 6.1 million people (about 60% of the population) in a situation of extreme hunger. In Syria, Yemen and South Sudan, there were warnings that the delivery of humanitarian aid was being blocked.

In this context, in May 2018 the UN Security Council unanimously approved Resolution 2417, which for the first time explicitly acknowledges that conflicts can cause food insecurity, which in turn can aggravate them. Promoted by the Netherlands, Côte d'Ivoire, Kuwait and Sweden, the resolution also condemns the use of hunger as a weapon of war and threatens sanctions against those who block the delivery of humanitarian aid aimed at alleviating food shortages and famines. Several actors hailed the initiative for paying attention to this problem and stressing the interconnections between conflict, forced displacement and food insecurity. However, others warned that the resolution ran the risk of becoming worthless if effective mechanisms for monitoring and implementing it were not established. Still others insisted that the resolution provides tools to address a situation that is conceived as transitory (the access of humanitarian aid to people affected by conflicts), yet it is essential to intensify efforts to reverse the dynamics of violence at the same time. In this vein, in 2018 the WFP warned that armed conflicts were the main obstacle to achieving the goal of "zero hunger" in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.