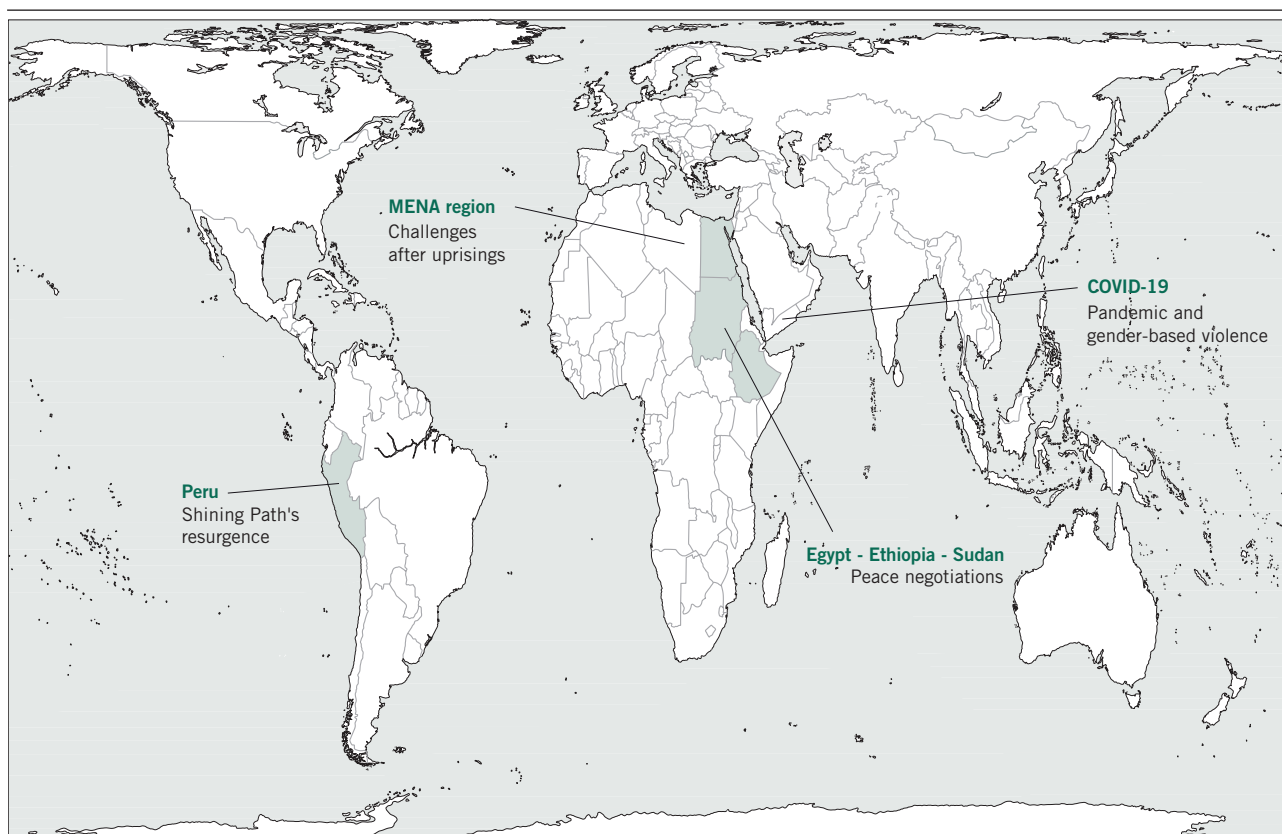


## 5. Risk scenarios for 2021

Drawing on the analysis of the contexts of armed conflict and socio-political crisis in 2020, in this chapter the School for a Culture of Peace identifies four scenarios that, due to their conditions and dynamics, may worsen and become a focus of greater instability and violence. The risk scenarios for 2021 refer to the COVID-19 pandemic and the worsening violence against women, the climate of tension between Ethiopia and Egypt, and to a lesser extent, Sudan due to the construction of a dam in the Nile river; the Shining Path's resurgence in Peru; and the challenges and risks 10 years after the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East.

Map 5.1. Risk scenarios for 2021



## 5.1 The COVID-19 pandemic and the worsening violence against women

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many inequalities, including those of gender. Specifically, it has aggravated the pre-existing global problem of gender-based violence and has increased the risk of a related rise in the near future and beyond. Meanwhile, it remains invisible and neglected by political and social actors amidst the normalisation of violence and the deep-rootedness of patriarchy, the redirection of priorities and funds and the excessive burden placed on services and actors involved in the response. In contexts with added crises, such as armed conflicts, the risks produced by the COVID-19 pandemic are increased as it intersects with the impacts and dynamics of armed violence.

The data available on gender-based violence since the irruption of the COVID-19 pandemic shows a serious increase in violence against women and girls in all kinds of contexts. A UN report from April 2020 already warned of a 30% rise in calls to telephone support lines in Cyprus, of another 33% in Singapore, of a 25% spike in emergency calls for domestic violence in Argentina and of a 30% increase in reports of domestic violence in France. At that early period in the spread of the pandemic, the UN warned that although it was early for global data, there were already many worrying reports of intensification of gender violence, with 25% increases in many countries with systems to report it.<sup>1</sup> As the UN has pointed out, restrictions associated with the pandemic can act as factors aggravating violence, such as isolation measures, which have forced many women to live interruptedly with the perpetrators, restrictions on movement and overcrowded housing conditions, concerns about health, safety and livelihood and difficulties in accessing services and support networks.<sup>2</sup> The coronavirus pandemic intensifies a situation that was already very serious, as 243 million women and girls between 15 and 49 years old had faced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner at some point in the 12 months before the outbreak.<sup>3</sup>

Taking the form of a coordinated United Nations appeal, the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan for the period from April to December 2020 asserted that gender inequalities would worsen with the pandemic, and recalled that in public health emergencies, women and girls tend to have less access to protection networks and services, including sexual and reproductive health,

and may face greater risks of violence in quarantines.<sup>4</sup> It also warned that the LGBTBI population could face a greater negative impact, as a group that habitually faces discrimination, prejudice and barriers to accessing care. Another study commissioned by UN Women has indicated that the pandemic is increasing the poverty rate for women. The report predicts and cautions that in 2021 there will be 435 million women and girls in the world living on less than \$ 1.90 a day, including 47 million of them due to COVID-19. It is also estimated that the pandemic could force 2.5 million girls into child marriage in 2025, on top of the estimated 58.4 million without a pandemic, according to Save the Children. The NGO said that the risk is greatest during humanitarian crises associated with armed conflict, flooding, drought and disease outbreaks.<sup>6</sup>

In situations of armed conflict, the intersection of war and pandemic can further widen the economic gender gap and exacerbate gender-based violence and its manifestations. As ICRC analysts point out, the pandemic has had an impact in two opposite directions. On the one hand, sexual violence has increased in contexts already affected by conflict and violence—an increase in both domestic violence and sexual violence that is contrary to international humanitarian law (IHL), including sexual violence by armed actors, forced prostitution and sexual slavery.<sup>6</sup> The same analysts cite humanitarian agencies' figures of 31 million additional cases of gender-based violence in the first six months of confinement, which include both domestic violence and sexual violence in violation of IHL. Others warn of the risk of increased sexual violence in the context of humanitarian crisis, though they did mention the difficulties in obtaining data.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the pandemic has led to a reduction in resources and support services in a context of changing priorities and redirected resources in response to COVID-19, restrictions on movement, the oversaturation of support providers and services, accumulated impacts on health infrastructure and others.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, the intersecting dynamics of gun violence and the pandemic are increasing the risk of exposure to gender-based violence in multiple ways. In Yemen, for example, obstacles to ensure access to water, stemming from attacks on civilian infrastructure due to the armed

***The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened gender inequality and the violence faced by women and girls***

1. United Nations, *Policy Brief. The Impact of COVID-19 on Women*. 9th April 2020.

2. UN WOMEN, *COVID-19 and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls*, EVAW COVID-19 briefs, 2020.

3. Ibid.

4. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Global Humanitarian Response Plan COVID-19*, March 2020.

5. Save the Children, *Global Girlhood 2020: COVID-19 and progress in peril*, 2020.

6. May Maloney, *Sexual violence in armed conflicts: can we prevent a COVID-19 backslide?* Humanitarian Law & Policy Blog, 25th November 2020.

7. Sophie Sutrich, *COVID-19, conflict and sexual violence: reversing the burden of proof*, Humanitarian Law & Policy Blog, 19th June 2020.

8. May Maloney, op. cit.

conflict, the climate emergency and the mismanagement of water resources, have increased with the pandemic at the same time that the price of water has risen.<sup>9</sup> Altogether, this has forced many Yemeni women to travel farther to access water, especially in rural areas, exposing themselves to a higher risk of sexual violence. In Libya, the dynamics of violence increased during 2020, including actions against international law that had direct impacts on the response to the pandemic, with attacks on hospitals and deliberate cuts to the water supply in the capital, entailing serious consequences for the rights of women and the civilian population. In Burkina Faso, northeastern Nigeria and South Sudan, conflicts and the pandemic aggravated situations of food

insecurity, increasing the risk of deepening inequalities and gender violence.

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened gender inequality and the violence faced by women and girls, specifically in contexts of armed violence and other crisis situations. Even if confinement and movement restrictions have gradually been lifted, various impacts and factors associated with the pandemic will foreseeably continue to aggravate the inequality gap and the risks of exposure to gender violence in the years to come, which only strengthens the urgent need to put the rights of women and girls at the forefront of action and policy.

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9. Margaret Habib, *COVID-19 exacerbates the effects of water shortages on women in Yemen*, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 20 August 2020.

## 5.2. The Shining Path's resurgence in Peru

In 2020, Peru experienced one of the greatest political crises in recent times, with three presidents in office in a period of a few days, massive demonstrations across the country and accusations of excessive use of force by the police levelled by international bodies such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as by international human rights organisations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. As these events unfolded, capturing the political and media attention of the country, some analysts warned of an increase in tension linked to the Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso), a Maoist armed organisation that actively participated in the internal armed conflict in Peru between 1980 and 2000 and caused the deaths of over 69,000 people, according to the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Although the capture in 1992 and subsequent sentence to life imprisonment of its leader and founder, Abimael Guzmán, greatly weakened the group, to the point that the government declared the group militarily defeated and the conflict ended in 2000, there were some remnant factions that continued to operate in various regions of the country, especially in the Alto Huallaga Valley and in the Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro Valley (VRAEM). In the last decade, however, the state has focused its counterinsurgency strategy on the VRAEM, especially after the capture in 2012 of the Shining Path's leader in Alto Huallaga, Florindo Eleuterio Flores Hala, alias Comrade Artemio, loyal to Guzmán's ideology and strategy. As the last active member of the Shining Path central committee, his arrest caused the group to be practically dismantled in Alto Huallaga.

The declaration of the state of emergency in 1999 in the VRAEM and the increasing militarisation of the region, where the state currently has 52 military bases and has between 8,000 and 10,000 soldiers deployed, led to the arrest of important leaders of the group and weakened its structures, but in late 2020 the president of Peru acknowledged that the Militarised Communist Party of Peru (MPCP), a name used by the group in recent years, continued to pose a significant threat to the country's national security. Also in late 2020, the Defence Minister expressed her concern about the MPCP's growing capacity for war and about the rebound in its armed actions. According to some analysts, the state's concern not only has to do with the uptick in MPCP attacks, but also with the resilience that the group has shown in its strongholds in recent decades due to its allegedly solid alliances with drug trafficking

organisations, and with the communist movement's attempts to create and strengthen support structures. In this regard, in December the government announced the arrest of 77 people for creating structures to support the Maoist movement in Peru. Several of the detainees were linked to the Movement for Amnesty and Fundamental Rights (MOVAREF), which the state considers the Shining Path's political and legal wing, including one of its leaders and the lawyer of Abimael Guzmán.

Regarding the MPCP's capacity for war, there was a certain upturn in armed actions in the VRAEM in 2020. At least 16 people died and several others were injured in various episodes of violence, most of them attacks carried out by the MPCP. The ambush of a military convoy in late October claimed the lives of three soldiers and wounded four. In late August, there was a clash in which four combatants and two soldiers died in the Ayacucho region. A firefight in the same region in July killed a soldier and three members of the MPCP and an attack against several Peruvian Army military vessels in the town of Puerto Palmeras in December claimed one soldier's life and wounded three others. Although this death toll is clearly lower than before, it

***Despite the large-scale military and police deployment in the VRAEM in the last two decades, the Peruvian government acknowledged that the Militarised Communist Party of Peru continues to pose a significant threat to national security***

is also true that there has recently been an increase in attacks against military targets and facilities. According to a report by the NGO Waynakuna, allegedly based on data collected by the insurgency, 446 people (including 323 soldiers and 85 police officers) had died in 276 episodes of violence in the VRAEM between 1999 and 2017. However, other media reports based on police data revealed that 165 military and police personnel had died in the same region between 1999 and 2019. According to reports issued by the US State Department, which considers the Shining Path to be a terrorist organisation (the only one in Latin America, together with the FARC and the ELN in Colombia),

there was an average of around 100 armed attacks per year in the VRAEM between 2006 and 2013<sup>10</sup>, but they declined significantly after two of the top four MPCP leaders known as Comrade Alipio and Comrade Gabriel were killed in combat in 2013. For example, in 2014 and 2015 the number of attacks by the MPCP had fallen to 20 and 13, respectively.

According to the government and various analysts, in recent decades the Shining Path (and later the MPCP) has taken advantage of the rugged, remote, jungle and isolated nature of some areas of the VRAEM to forge a solid alliance with organisations linked to drug trafficking,

10. Patricia Santillán, *Sendero Luminoso: evolución histórica y relevancia actual*, Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, Documento de Opinión, 30 March 2017.

to which they provide security and protection both in the production and transit of narcotics. According to some, the group, which may consist of around 450 people (the alleged number of the group's members varies significantly depending on the source), is also obtaining resources for the protection it provides to peasants who grow coca leaves. According to data from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the VRAEM is the home to 70% of the coca leaf crops in Peru, the world's second largest producer of cocaine. According to recent data (IDEELE), 30% of the VRAEM population (almost 450,000 people) live in poverty and another 58% are below the extreme poverty line.<sup>11</sup> In August 2020, the US government's Office of National Drug Control Policy stated that in 2019 the area devoted to coca leaf cultivation and cocaine production had increased by 38% and 40% respectively over the previous year.

The consolidation of the VRAEM as the MPCP's stronghold and as the epicentre of drug production in Peru has in turn exacerbated certain dynamics that could increase tension and violence in the region. For instance, there is growing pressure from coca growers on the lands of indigenous peoples in the region, such as the Ashaninka communities. Some of the strategies used by such groups include the harassment of these communities and the creation of villages to legalise their occupation and possession of the land, which is normally deforested to grow coca leaves or install secret laboratories to process basic cocaine paste. Furthermore, in the face of pressure from peasant groups and drug trafficking groups to increase the area devoted to coca leaf cultivation, in recent years the government has declared that it will increase the so-called "peasant rounds" that have played an active role in its counterinsurgency strategy to fight against the Shining Path and against the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement. The government affirms that its work consists mainly of providing training in the responsible use of weapons to the people living in these committees and in registering and controlling such weapons, but other organisations indicate that the delegation of security powers to community committees may entail human rights abuses and violations.

Faced with this complex situation, the Peruvian government has on several occasions expressed its commitment to militarily defeat the Shining Path and has reiterated its support for the Peruvian Armed Forces' efforts in the VRAEM, while also acknowledging that the counterinsurgency strategy in the region cannot only be of a military nature. In this regard, after coming to power, President Martín Vizcarra, who was removed from office in late 2020, publicly stated his intention to place greater emphasis on the policy of forced eradication of the coca leaf and on offering alternative crops to the peasants of the VRAEM to improve living conditions in the region, reduce coca production there and erode the MPCP's base of support and funding

mechanisms. Thus, since the policy to eradicate illicit crops was implemented in the 1980s, it was carried out in the VRAEM for the first time in 2019. It should be noted, however, that only 750 of the more than 25,500 hectares forcibly eradicated were located in the VRAEM, but the government insisted that this is a turning point in the strategy towards the region. Similarly, in October 2020 the president repeated his intention to implement a new policy to combat drug trafficking and the Shining Path insurgency based on a comprehensive approach to development in the VRAEM, emphasising not only the replacement of crops, but also the promotion of infrastructure, agriculture, sanitation and health. Moreover, in mid-2020 the government's National Commission for Development and Life without Drugs declared that the price of cocaine in the VRAEM had fallen by 58% as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which in turn could erode the MPCP's sources of funding.

There are still unknowns about whether the new government that was established in Peru after Vizcarra's removal in 2020 will decide to continue with a more holistic approach that transcends a strictly militaristic solution to the conflict with the MPCP and drug trafficking in the VRAEM. In any case, it does not seem that the MPCP, led by the brothers Víctor and Jorge Quispe Palomino after the arrest of Comrade Feliciano in 1999, is open to starting any negotiations or rapprochement with the state. In contrast, the leader of the Shining Path in Alto Huallaga, Comrade Artemio, did advocate this path and even publicly requested political dialogue with the government in 2011, shortly before he was arrested. Even if the MPCP has publicly made political and social demands, the government and much of Peruvian public opinion do not consider the group to be the direct heir to the Shining Path, but rather an organisation that is sometimes branded as narco-terrorist. In fact, Abimael Guzmán does not recognise the group and the MPCP described Guzmán as a traitor, having distanced himself from the strategy that he followed after his imprisonment in 1992 (in fact, after Guzmán's arrest, the Shining Path movement was split between groups more supportive of the agreement with the state, commonly called "acuerdistas", and those who want to continue the armed struggle, called "Proseguir" or "Sendero Rojo" ('Red Path'). In short, there are several factors that cast uncertainty about the political and social situation in the VRAEM and about the tension linked to the political and armed actions of the Shining Path movement, such as the political crisis that the country experienced at the end of the year, which could lead to a change in strategic orientation in managing the conflict, the rebound in armed actions by the MPCP in 2020, the increase in political and judicial pressure from the state on organisations considered related to the Shining Path movement and the strong presence of drug trafficking organisations in the VRAEM, a region that is difficult to access, lacks state institutions and suffers from high rates of poverty.

11. Mariella Villasante, *La guerra en el VRAEM: los problemas del Estado para restablecer la paz y los vacíos legales aplazados*, Revista Idee, num. 284.



### 5.3. A spring to come? Challenges and risks 10 years after the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East

The date of 17 December 2020 marked the 10th anniversary since the young street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi blew himself up in Sidi Bouzid, one of the most economically depressed areas in the interior of Tunisia. A decade had passed since his act of protest became a symbol of exhaustion and set off massive popular demonstrations to protest social injustice, corruption, inequalities, restrictions on freedom and the lack of opportunities in many countries in North Africa and the Middle East. The phenomenon spread rapidly, challenging the legitimacy of many of the authoritarian regimes in the region. Despite the unique aspects of each context, the revolts of what was called the “Arab Spring” showed that the grievances were based on common ground: a crisis of legitimacy and a lack of representative institutions, frustrated young populations with no expectations for improvement, the concentration of power, nepotism, impunity and more. The seemingly untouchable governments of the region tried to quell the revolts with a combination of incentives and repression (the now classic carrot-and-stick strategy), though with mixed results. Some rulers fell in less than a year after decades in power, such as Ben Ali in Tunisia, Mubarak in Egypt, Gaddafi in Libya and Saleh in Yemen. Bumpy transitions began and developed in different ways: the Yemeni experience was derailed in less than three years; Tunisia continues to inspire the most hope in the region; and some contexts led to increasingly complex armed conflicts due to the proliferation of armed groups, the projection of foreign interests and the open or veiled involvement of many regional and international actors, as illustrated by the situations in Yemen, Syria and Libya.

Not enough time has passed to assess the historical impact of a phenomenon of such magnitude as the Arab Spring. In the short term, however, a decade provides enough perspective to identify a series of challenges and risks with the potential to destabilise the region. Though several factors could be considered, whose relevance depends on different contexts, this analysis focuses on three key aspects. First, the grievances that motivated the riots have persisted or the situation has even worsened in some respects. Ten years later, youth unemployment rates in the region remain the highest in the world, a problem of great concern considering that two-thirds of the region’s population is under 30 years old. According to the ILO, in 2020 the Arab and North African countries had the lowest youth participation

rate in the job market, at only 27%.<sup>12</sup> Living standards have not improved, but have remained the same or have worsened in many contexts, especially in countries like Syria and Yemen where socio-economic indicators have plummeted after years of conflict and violence.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the North Africa and Middle East region continues to be perceived as highly corrupt according to international indices such as those of Transparency International and the limited progress promoted by civil society has been blocked by the implementation of emergency measures to deal with COVID-19.<sup>14</sup> Surveys in several countries in the region indicate that large sectors of the population consider that their situation is worse than before the riots and that the gap between rich and poor has widened in the last decade.<sup>15</sup>

The continuity of the grievances partly explains the new wave of revolts that shook the region in 2019, with massive protests in Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon and Sudan. Though these countries had not experienced intense protests at the beginning of the decade, on this occasion their rulers were also forced to leave power. However, as Georges Fahmi points out, the people who demonstrated in 2019 had already learned several lessons from the first revolutionary wave, including that the fall of the head of the regime does not amount to a change in the system.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, they persisted in their protests until the pandemic forced a halt to public demonstrations rejecting the elites and their power. These new protests challenged those who considered the revolts to be over and bolstered arguments that demonstrations would continue or become more vigorous in the region due to the persistent erosion of the social contract and the deep feeling of injustice there, in addition to the severe economic consequences of the pandemic.

Joining the persisting grievances is a second factor linked to the strengthening, return and/or reconfiguration of authoritarianism in the region. Various analysts agree that faced with questions about their legitimacy, local regimes have strengthened their repressive structures, in part thanks to the support of actors such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), champions of the counterrevolutionary forces. Egypt has become an illustrative case of this trend, since after the coup against the government of the Muslim Brotherhood—a turning point for Islamism in the region—the military regime has stepped up its persecution of dissidents from across the political spectrum and has buttressed

12. International Labour Organisation (ILO), *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020: Technology and the future of jobs*, International Labour Office, Geneva: ILO, 2020.

13. Kali Robinson, *The Arab Spring at Ten Years: What's the Legacy of the Uprisings?*, Council on Foreign Relations, 3 December 2020.

14. Transparency International, *Middle East & North Africa: Corruption continues as institutions and political rights weaken*, 29 January 2019; *CPI 2020: Middle East and North Africa*, 28 January 2021.

15. Guardian-YouGov poll, “Life has got worse since Arab Spring, say people across Middle East”, *The Guardian*, 17 December 2020.

16. Georges Fahmi, *Five Lessons From the New Arab Uprisings*, 12 November 2019.

its power. Restrictions on freedom and human rights violations are considered worse than what existed under Mubarak era. The brutal crackdown on dissent has also been key to the Syrian regime's survival strategy. With the exception of Tunisia, indicators on political rights and civil liberties have deteriorated at the regional level, as has the situation of press freedom, with more journalists imprisoned for reasons related to how they do their jobs.<sup>17</sup> Arab Barometer surveys confirm that most of the population in the region continues to prefer democracy. However, some analysts warn of a certain “nostalgia” for heavy-handed rulers in some contexts. In 2020, an opinion survey in several countries in the area (Algeria, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia) identified high levels of support (more than 50% in the five countries) for a strong and efficient leader, even at the expense of not fully complying with rules or procedures, or even bypassing the respective parliaments (more than 50% in Libya, Tunisia and Lebanon).<sup>18</sup> Even in Tunisia, analysts have identified nostalgia for the old regime among some parts of the population and have warned about the increase in populist discourse.<sup>19</sup>

***A decade after the uprisings in the region, the persisting grievances and the deterioration of the socio-economic situation, the strengthening of authoritarianism and the long-term consequences of the serious armed conflicts in the region are all serious risk factors***

A third risk factor has to do with complexities stemming from the development of armed conflicts in the region, which have imposed serious long-term consequences and great obstacles for negotiations and initiatives for non-violent conflict resolution. There are several aspects to consider here. First is the very serious impact of armed conflicts on entire generations in the region, taking into account the high levels of lethality, forced displacement and the devastating effect of humanitarian crises. The wars in Libya, Syria and Yemen are among the most intense in the world. In Syria alone, over half a million people have died in a decade. Another 250,000 have died in Yemen since 2015—more than half due to indirect consequences of the conflict, such as a lack of access to health or food—and the country faces the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. Half of Syria's population has been forced to flee their homes due to the violence, placing the country at the top of the global refugee and internally displaced population rankings. Civilians have been targeted in indiscriminate and deliberate attacks by various armed actors in an atmosphere of impunity, which sets a

dangerous precedent for systematic violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

Added to this are the consequences springing from the proliferation of armed actors in the region and the growing involvement of regional and international actors in conflicts, phenomena that increase their complexity and make them difficult to tackle. In Syria, Yemen and Libya, this drift has aggravated institutional weakness and accentuated the fragmentation of power, turning these countries into territories divided into different zones of influence and control.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, in all three cases, the development of hostilities is directly influenced by the involvement, competition and projection of the interests of foreign actors, including Russia, the United States, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Egypt and others. In this context, some analysts have stressed that the North Africa and Middle East region faces an unprecedented level of interrelated conflicts, with new dynamics overlapping and intersecting with pre-existing conflicts that at times conceal the original catalysts of the conflicts.<sup>21</sup> This trend has been accentuated by the absence of effective regional and international mechanisms for resolving and transforming conflicts and poses a challenge for actors and institutions that seek to promote peaceful solutions.

Despite the bitter assessment of this decade after the revolts, various voices inside and outside the region insist on vindicating the process and its value as a turning point. Along these lines, they highlight its symbolic value by challenging the idea of “Arab exceptionality” and the perception of a region condemned to authoritarianism. Despite what has happened in recent years, polls indicate that in many countries of the region, a majority say they do not regret the Arab Spring protests.<sup>22</sup> The revolts still resonate as a sign of non-conformity, of non-resignation and of overcoming the barriers of fear. They are still seen a reflection of the deep aspirations of the peoples of the region to a dignified life. In fact, various analysts assert that the regimes' harsh crackdowns are rooted in fear, the perception of a threat and the realisation that the revolts could be repeated, because if they have happened once, they can happen again.<sup>23</sup>

17. Kali Robinson, op. cit.

18. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, *10 years after the Arab Springs: Where does public opinion in the region stand today?* KAS/POLDIMED, 2020.

19. International Crisis Group, *Avoiding a Populist Surge in Tunisia*, Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Briefing no. 73, 4 March 2020.

20. Virginie Collombier et. al. “Armed conflicts and the erosion of the state: The cases of Iraq, Libya, Yemen and Syria” in Jordi Quero and Cristina Sala (eds.), *MENARA Booklet for Humanitarian Actors*, CIDOB, February 2019

21. Joost Hiltermann and María Rodríguez, “De las profundidades a la superficie: catalizadores de conflicto en Oriente Medio y el Magreb”, *ARI* 70/2019, Real Instituto Elcano, 18 June 2019.

22. The Guardian-YouGov poll, op. cit.

23. Nesrine Malik, “The Arab Spring wasn't in vain. Next time will be different”, *The Guardian*, 21 December 2020.

## 5.4. The Nile Basin: cooperation or conflict?

The Nile, Africa's longest river and the second longest in the world –following recent studies that give the world lead to the Amazon– has been the epicentre of disputes in the Horn of Africa and East Africa for decades. At the centre of the conflict are Egypt and Ethiopia, the two main regional players. The construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Blue Nile –a tributary of the Nile on Ethiopian territory– which Ethiopia has been constructing since 2011, has exacerbated the situation and the climate of tension between Ethiopia and Egypt, and to a lesser extent, Sudan.

Egypt depends on the Nile for virtually all of its water supply. The river accounts for almost all of its drinking and irrigation water, as the country receives little rainfall and almost all of its farmland is irrigated. The Nile is also a key transport route for the country. Its main tributary, the Blue Nile, flows from Ethiopia's Lake Tana and joins the White Nile in Sudan, where it contributes about 85% of the water that forms the main Nile. It is also central to almost every aspect of life in Ethiopia; about 32% of the country lies in the Nile Basin, where about 40% of the country's population is concentrated. In the case of Sudan, the Nile crosses the entire country from south to north and provides about 77% of the country's freshwater.<sup>24</sup>

Historically, Egypt has adopted an approach in which the Nile is a matter of national security and its positioning has included threats of military action against riparian states if they interfere with the river's water volume. The first agreement concerning the management of the waters of the Nile was reached between Britain, as the colonial power in East Africa, and Egypt in 1929. Cairo was favoured over other riparian countries for its agricultural potential, as well as for being the guarantor of the management of the Suez Canal, vital to British imperial ambitions. The other British riparian colonies –Sudan, Uganda, Kenya and Tanganyika (now Tanzania)–, as well as Ethiopia, had no say in these agreements. Under the terms, Egypt would not need the consent of upstream states to undertake water projects in its own territory, but could veto projects on any tributary of the Nile in the countries through which the Nile flows, including Lake Victoria. Lake Victoria, the world's second largest freshwater lake, is fed by direct rainfall and thousands of streams from Tanzania, Burundi, Uganda and Kenya, all located in central eastern Africa. Egypt maintains that the 1929 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty and its amended version, the 1959 Agreement, remain valid. These bilateral agreements completely ignored the needs of other riparian states, including Ethiopia. Consequently,

none of the other Nile Basin countries have endorsed the agreements.

Attempts to build a multilateral framework for cooperative and sustainable management of the Nile's waters have been ongoing. In 1999, the Nile Basin countries created the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), which aimed to establish a forum to promote the collaborative development and management of the Nile waters, including the drafting of a multilateral treaty. In 2010, four countries (Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania and Ethiopia) signed and ratified the Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA)<sup>25</sup> after a negotiation process between all riparian countries, including Egypt and Sudan, which eventually rejected the agreement because it did not serve their interests. Burundi and Kenya subsequently also signed the agreement, but did not ratify it. Six countries

need to ratify or accede to the agreement for it to enter into force. The Treaty was intended to establish principles, rights and obligations to ensure the long-term and sustainable management and development of the shared waters of the Nile. Under its provisions, the Nile Basin States would assume the obligation to cooperate in the conservation, management and development of the basin and its waters. The Treaty has no legal effect on Nile Basin states that do not sign and ratify the CFA, as they are not bound by it. The CFA provides for the establishment of a permanent institutional mechanism, the Nile River Basin Commission (NRBC). The NRBC would become the successor to the rights, obligations and assets of the NBI.

***The construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam initiated by Ethiopia in 2011 along the course of the Blue Nile, a tributary of the Nile on Ethiopian territory, has led to increased tensions between Ethiopia and Egypt and, to a lesser extent, Sudan***

In 2011 Ethiopia announced the construction of the GERD on the Blue Nile riverbed after signing a contract with the Italian multinational Salini Costruttori for between \$4.5 billion and \$4.8 billion, according to various sources. With a power generation capacity of 6.45 GW, the dam will be the largest hydropower plant in Africa and the seventh largest in the world and will allow Ethiopia to control the waters of the Nile River. Once construction of the dam is completed, the filling of the reservoir may take between five and 15 years to complete, depending on climate conditions during the period and the agreements reached between Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt. Cairo expressed concern over the announcement and the size of the dam, and threatened to use all means at its disposal to protect its interests, since in periods of prolonged drought the management of the Nile is crucial to the country's survival. In the case of Sudan, the country supports the GERD (because of the benefits derived from the project in terms of cheap energy production, irrigation potential and control of water flow to avoid floods), but its concern is focused on the impacts

24. Nile Basin Initiative [online]. Accessed on 10 December 2020.

25. Cooperative Framework Agreement [online]. Accessed on 10 December 2020.



derived from its construction, as the dam is located 20km from the border and poor coordination could mean the flooding of the Sudanese Roseires dam, and for this reason it has demanded that impact studies be carried out, as well as guarantees in reservoir management and safety procedures.

In the last decade, different negotiation processes have been launched between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia to try to establish a framework for cooperation on the issue, and in 2015 the leaders of the three countries signed the GERD Declaration of Principles, which highlighted their commitment to cooperate and peacefully resolve their differences. To date, this has not borne fruit. At the end of 2019, the three countries resumed talks under the observation of the US and the World Bank (WB). In February 2020, Ethiopia rejected a draft agreement initiated by Egypt and argued that the US and the WB were overstepping the framework of impartiality in their observation by proposing drought water accumulation mitigation measures that favoured Cairo. Following this, on 10 April Addis Ababa proposed an agreement affecting the first two years of reservoir filling, which was rejected by Cairo and Khartoum (which demanded a global and not a partial agreement). This Ethiopian proposal was intended to reduce tensions in the short term, facilitate the building of trust that would lead to a comprehensive agreement being reached and the commencement of operations to fill the reservoir. Although Sudan acknowledged that the parties were very close to agreement,<sup>26</sup> the main stumbling blocks remain unresolved: the coordination and dispute resolution mechanism and drought protocols, among others. During 2020, the EU and South Africa (as chair of the AU) joined in observing the dispute. However, although talks resumed on 21 May, they stalled again in mid-June due to a lack of agreement on the dispute settlement mechanism, the minimum river flow in times of drought and the legal status of the final agreement.

A number of issues have contributed to exacerbating the situation in the second half of the year. Firstly, Ethiopia's unilateral decision to start filling the reservoir. On 19 June Ethiopia reiterated that it would start filling the dam in July with or without an agreement, prompting Egypt and Sudan to request UN Security Council intervention. On 20 June the Egyptian president reiterated his commitment to use all diplomatic means to resolve the crisis, and although talks remained open with the aim of reaching an agreement after an AU meeting on 26 June with Ethiopia pledging to halt the imminent filling of the reservoir until an agreement was reached, the following day Addis Ababa announced the filling of the reservoir to coincide with the rainy season. At a UN Security Council meeting on 29 June, Cairo announced that GERD posed a threat to its security and warned that conflict could break out if the UN did not intervene to prevent it. On 3 July, tripartite talks resumed under the auspices of the AU, and on 27 July Cairo announced that the three countries had agreed to prioritise

the development of a legally binding agreement to fill and operate the GERD. On the same day, the Ethiopian prime minister said that Ethiopia had achieved its first-year target for filling the reservoir thanks to the strong rainy season, prompting Egypt and Sudan to immediately condemn the unilateral move. There continued to be clashes surrounding Ethiopia's position that it intends to negotiate an agreement only regarding the filling of the dam, rather than –as Egypt and Sudan intend– a comprehensive agreement on filling and operation, with a subsequent separate treaty on the allocation of Blue Nile water being negotiated separately. Despite the AU's efforts, the situation remained unchanged for the rest of the year.

Secondly, it is worth noting the position of the US, as a traditional ally of Egypt and Ethiopia. From being an observer to the negotiations until February 2020, it was accused by Ethiopia of favouring Egypt's interests by proposing measures that allegedly reinforced stances defended by Cairo. This was compounded in early September by the announcement of a \$130 million cut in US aid to Ethiopia in the absence of progress in the tripartite talks, in an attempt to force negotiations. US President Donald Trump's statements in October further aggravated the situation, when he stated that Egypt could not live with the dam and could “blow up” the construction. The Ethiopian prime minister did not respond to these inflammatory statements, but shortly afterwards the Ethiopian foreign minister recalled the US ambassador for consultation to clarify Washington's position on the issue.

Another issue to consider is the internal pressures to maintain maximalist positions in both Ethiopia and Egypt, as both countries consider the issue to be of vital national interest. The fragile internal political situation in Ethiopia, compounded by the war in the Tigray region, has led to a climate of polarisation that reduces room for manoeuvre and does not contribute to facilitating a negotiation process since it could be interpreted by nationalist sectors as granting concessions to the adversary at the negotiating table. Ethiopia's announcements in October and November regarding the closure of airspace over the GERD to ensure the safety of the dam, and the announcement that the GERD is expected to start generating electricity in June 2021, respectively, are interpreted along these lines. In addition, Egypt's diplomatic offensive is perceived in Ethiopia as an attempt to stop the GERD project and maintain the unequal status quo.

The GERD reservoir has already started to fill, so time is running out for negotiations to reach a compromise, increasing the pressure on Sudan and especially Egypt. The fact that Ethiopia initiated the filling unilaterally has left Egypt in a weak position, as the country had opposed the move. Ethiopia has taken a decision that has contributed to the deterioration of the fragile climate of trust between the three countries. The Blue Nile is critical to the development of the Egyptian, Ethiopian and

26. UN Security Council, Letter dated 2 June 2020 from the Permanent Representative of the Sudan to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2020/480, June 2020.

Sudanese populations, and all three countries have strong incentives to reach an agreement. Such an agreement would result in a global commitment across the Nile Basin states. It is worth noting that changes at the helm of the US administration could contribute to a new direction in this dispute. Transboundary water cooperation is a key element in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this regard, climate change, combined with projected population growth and socio-economic

changes, increases the challenges of water management worldwide. A serious example of this is the dispute over the construction of the GERD, which is rooted in historical disputes exacerbated by colonialism that persist today, and in which climate change and the progressive scarcity of and competition for water may play a decisive role in aggravating the situation and increasing tensions between the countries of the region, with the potential to escalate into conflicts with serious consequences.