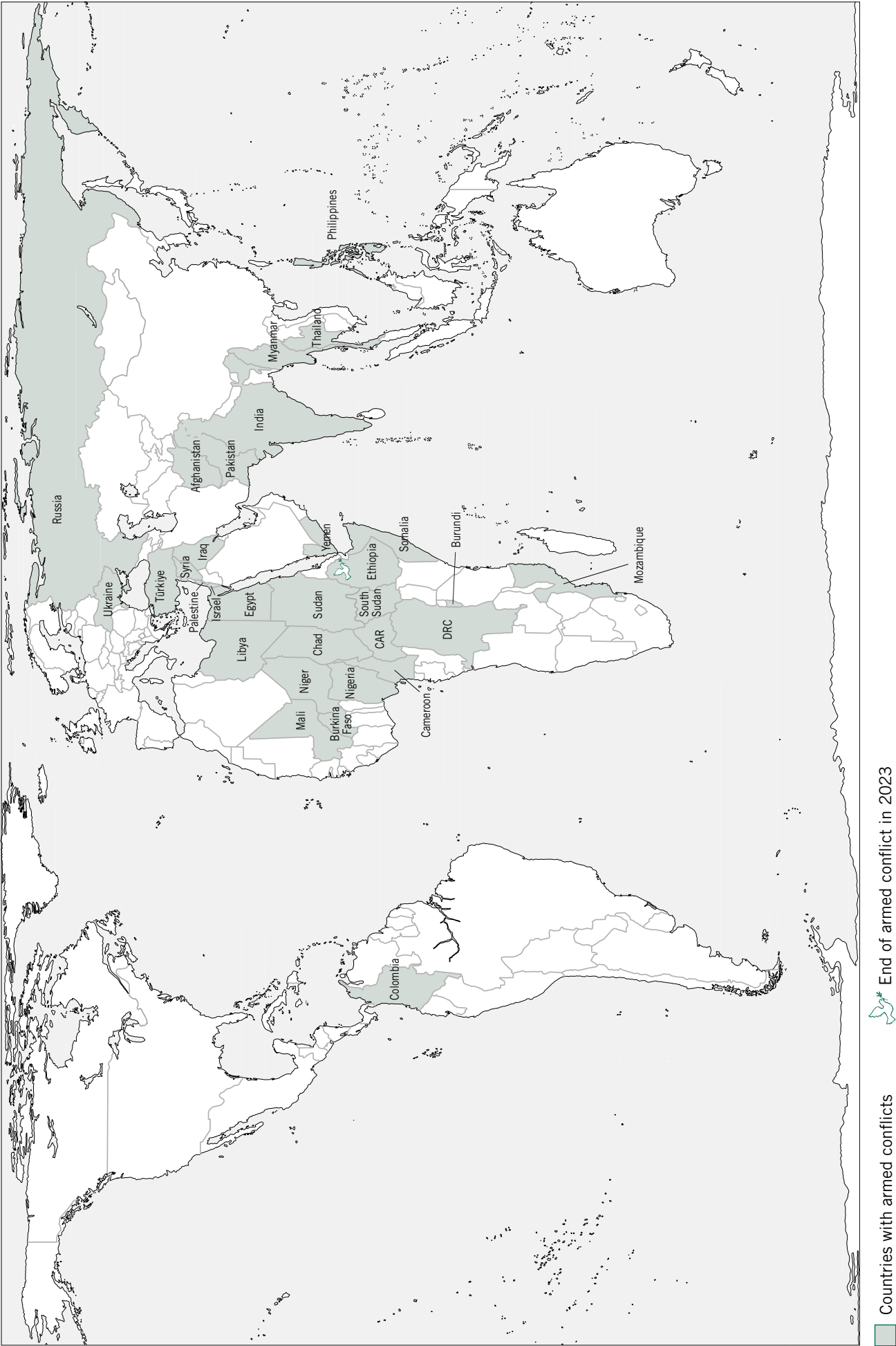


Map 1.1. Armed conflicts



# 1. Armed conflicts

- Thirty-six armed conflicts were reported in 2023, relatively more than the previous year, when there were 33, and the most since 2014.
- Most of the armed conflicts took place in Africa (18, half of the total), while the rest were in Asia and the Pacific (nine), the Middle East (six), Europe (two) and the Americas (one).
- Higher levels of violence and instability were reported in 42% of the armed conflicts in 2023, significantly more than the 30% of armed conflicts that had worsened the previous year
- The war in northern Mali resumed between the government and the Arab and Tuareg armed groups that had signed the 2015 Algiers peace agreement, organised under the Permanent Strategic Framework coalition (CSP).
- The Amhara special forces and Fano militias refused to dissolve and integrate into the Ethiopian police and the Ethiopian Army and clashed with federal government forces in increasingly intense battles.
- The M23's escalating attacks in the eastern DRC set off one of the world's major humanitarian and displacement crises and threatened to trigger a direct conflict between Rwanda and the DRC.
- The armed conflict that began on 15 April between the Sudanese Army and the paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces forcibly displaced over 7.5 million people and killed over 13,000 after eight months of fighting.
- Violence remained at high levels in Colombia, though there was less fighting between security forces and the groups ELN and EMC due to the ceasefire agreements reached.
- In Myanmar, the armed groups of the Three Brotherhood Alliance conducted the largest offensive against the security forces since the coup d'état in 2021.
- The invasion of and war in Ukraine caused serious damage in its second year, with 3.7 million people internally displaced, six million refugees in Europe and nearly half a million outside Europe.
- The Israeli campaign against the Gaza Strip in retaliation for Hamas' unprecedented attack on 7 October was denounced as collective punishment and genocide, with destabilising effects for the entire region.

The present chapter analyses the armed conflicts that occurred in 2023. It is organised into three sections. The first section offers a definition of armed conflict and its characteristics. The second section provides an analysis of the trends of conflicts in 2023, including global and regional trends and other issues related to international conflicts. The third section is devoted to describing the development and key events of the year in the various contexts. Furthermore, a map is included at the start of chapter that indicates the conflicts active in 2023.

Table 1.1. Summary of armed conflicts in 2023

Conflict <sup>1</sup> -beginning-	Type <sup>2</sup>	Main parties <sup>3</sup>	Intensity <sup>4</sup>
			Trend <sup>5</sup>
AFRICA			
Burundi -2015-	Internationalised internal	Government, Imbonerakure Youth branch, political party CNDD-FDD, political party CNL, armed groups RED-TABARA, FPB (previously FOREBU), FNL	1
	Government		↑
Cameroon (Ambazonia/North West and South West) -2018-	Internationalised internal	Government of Cameroon, Government of Nigeria, political-military secessionist movement including the opposition Ambazonia Coalition Team (ACT, including IG Sako, to which belong the armed groups Lebialem Red Dragons and SOCADEF) and the Ambazonia Governing Council (AGovC, including IG Sisiku, whose armed wing is the Ambazonia Defence Forces, ADF), multiple militias and smaller armed groups	2
	Self-government, Identity		=
CAR -2006-	Internationalised internal	Government, armed groups that are members of the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC, made up of anti-balaka factions led by Mokom and Ngaïssona, 3R, FPRC, MPC and UPC), opposition armed coalition Siriri, ethnic militia AAKG, Sudanese Rapid Support Forces (RSF) militias, other local and foreign armed groups, France, MINUSCA, Rwanda, Russia, Wagner Group	2
	Government, Resources		=
DRC (east) -1998-	International	DRC, Burundi, Angola, MONUSCO, EAC Regional Force (Burundi, Kenya, Uganda and South Sudan), SAMIDRC (regional force of the SADC, composed of troops from South Africa, Malawi and Tanzania), pro-government militias Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (VDP, known as Wazalendo, composed of dozens of former Mai Mai militias and other armed groups from North Kivu and South Kivu, like APCLS, PARECO-FF, Nyatura, Raïa Mutomboki), FDLR, FDLR splinter groups (CNRD-Ubwiyunge, RUD-Urunana), private security companies (Agemira RDC and Congo Protection); March 23 Movement (M23), Twirwaneho, Rwanda; other armed groups not part of Wazalendo, Burundian armed groups; armed group of Ugandan origin LRA; Ituri groups and community militias (including, CODECO/URDPC, FPIC, FRPI, MAPI, Zaïre-FPAC)	3
	Government, Identity, Resources		↑
DRC (east – ADF) -2014-	Internationalised internal	Government of DRC, Government of Uganda, Mai-Mai militias, armed opposition group ADF, MONUSCO	3
	System, Resources		=

1. This column includes the states in which armed conflicts are taking place, specifying in brackets the region within each state to which the crisis is confined or the name of the armed group involved in the conflict.
2. This report classifies and analyses armed conflicts using two criteria: on the one hand, the causes or clashes of interests and, on the other hand, the convergence between the scenario of conflict and the actors involved. The following main causes can be distinguished: demands for self-determination and self-government (Self-government) or identity aspirations (Identity); opposition to the political, economic, social or ideological system of a state (System) or the internal or international policies of a government (Government), which in both cases produces a struggle to take or erode power; or the struggle for the control of resources (Resources) or territory (Territory). In respect of the second type, the armed conflicts may be of an internal, Internationalised internal or international nature. An internal armed conflict is defined as a conflict involving armed actors from the same state who operate exclusively within the territory of this state. Secondly, an internationalised internal armed conflict is defined as that in which at least one of the parties involved is foreign and/or in which the tension spills over into the territory of neighbouring countries. Another factor taken into account in order to consider an armed conflict as internationalised internal is the existence of military bases of armed groups in neighbouring countries (in connivance with these countries) from which attacks are launched. Finally, an international conflict is one in which state and non-state parties from two or more countries confront each other. It should also be taken into account that most current armed conflicts have a significant regional or international dimension and influence due, among other factors, to flows of refugees, the arms trade, economic or political interests (such as legal or illegal exploitation of resources) that the neighbouring countries have in the conflict, the participation of foreign combatants or the logistical and military support provided by other states.
3. This column shows the actors that intervene directly in the hostilities. The main actors who participate directly in the conflicts are made up of a mixture of regular or irregular armed parties. The conflicts usually involve the government, or its armed forces, fighting against one or several armed opposition groups, but can also involve other irregular groups such as clans, guerrillas, warlords, armed groups in opposition to each other or militias from ethnic or religious communities. Although they most frequently use conventional weapons, and more specifically small arms (which cause most deaths in conflicts), in many cases other methods are employed, such as suicide attacks, bombings and sexual violence and even hunger as a weapon of war. There are also other actors who do not directly participate in the armed activities but who nevertheless have a significant influence on the conflict.
4. The intensity of an armed conflict (high, medium or low) and its trend (escalation of violence, reduction of violence, unchanged) are evaluated mainly on the basis of how deadly it is (number of fatalities) and according to its impact on the population and the territory. Moreover, there are other aspects worthy of consideration, such as the systematisation and frequency of the violence or the complexity of the military struggle (complexity is normally related to the number and fragmentation of the actors involved, to the level of institutionalisation and capacity of the state, and to the degree of internationalisation of the conflict, as well as to the flexibility of objectives and to the political will of the parties to reach agreements). As such, high-intensity armed conflicts are usually defined as those that cause over 1,000 fatalities per year, as well as affecting a significant proportion of the territory and population, and involving several actors (who forge alliances, confront each other or establish a tactical coexistence). Medium and low intensity conflicts, with over 100 fatalities per year, have the aforementioned characteristics but with a more limited presence and scope. An armed conflict is considered ended when a significant and sustained reduction in armed hostilities occurs, whether due to a military victory, an agreement between the actors in conflict, demobilisation by one of the parties, or because one of the parties abandons or significantly scales down the armed struggle as a strategy to achieve certain objectives. None of these options necessarily mean that the underlying causes of the armed conflict have been overcome. Nor do they exclude the possibility of new outbreaks of violence. The temporary cessation of hostilities, whether formal or tacit, does not necessarily imply the end of the armed conflict.
5. This column compares the trend of the events of 2023 with those that of 2022. The escalation of violence symbol (↑) indicates that the general situation in 2023 has been more serious than in the previous year; the reduction of violence symbol (↓) indicates an improvement in the situation; and the unchanged (=) symbol indicates that no significant changes have taken place.

Conflict -beginning-	Type	Main parties	Intensity
			Trend
AFRICA			
DRC (west) –2023-	Internal	DRC, Teke community militias, Yaka and Suku community militias (including the armed group Mobondo) and other allied community militias	2
	Identity, Resources, Territory		↑
Ethiopia (Amhara) -2023-	Internationalised internal	Government of Ethiopia, regional government of Amhara, Amhara Fano militia	3
	Government, Self-government, Identity		↑
Ethiopia (Oromia) -2022-	Internal	Government of Ethiopia, Oromia State Regional Government, armed group Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), pro-government Amharic militia Fano	3
	Self-government, Identity, Resources		=
Ethiopia (Tigray) -2020- <sup>6</sup>	Internationalised internal	Government of Ethiopia, Government of Eritrea, Tigray State Regional Government, security forces and militias of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), security forces of the Amhara and Afar regions, pro-government Amharic militia Fano	1
	Government, Self-government, Identity		End
Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram) -2011-	Internationalised internal	Government of Nigeria, Civilian Joint Task Force pro-government milita, Boko Haram factions (ISWAP, JAS-Abubakar Shekau, Ansaru, Bakura), civilian militias, Multinational Joint Task Force MNJTF (Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger)	3
	System		=
Libya -2011-	Internationalised internal	Unity Government with headquarters in Tripoli, National Stability Government (NSG) with headquarters in Tobruk, armed groups including the Libyan National Army (LNA, also called Arab Libyan Armed Forces, ALAF), ISIS, AQIM, mercenaries and Wagner Group, Türkiye	1
	Government, Resources, System		=
Mali -2012-	Internationalised internal	Government, the Permanent Strategic Framework (CSP) which brings together the armed groups affiliated with CMA (MNLA, MAA faction, CPA, HCUA) and Platform (GATIA, CMPFPR, MAA faction)–, The Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wa al-Muslimeen) (JNIM or GSIM), Islamic State in the West Africa Province (ISWAP) –also known as Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)-, Katiba Macina, MINUSMA, Russia, Wagner Group	3
	System, Self-government, Identity		↑
Mozambique (north) -2017-	Internationalised internal	Government, Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) or Islamic State in Mozambique Province (ISMP) -formerly Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jama (ASWJ)-, al-Qaeda, South African private security company DAG (Dyck Advisory Group), Tanzania, Rwanda, South Africa, Mission in Mozambique of the Southern African Development Community (SAMIM), “Naparama” local militias	1
	System, Identity		↓
Somalia -1988-	Internationalised internal	Federal Government of Somalia, pro-government regional forces, Somaliland, Puntland, clan militias and warlords, Ahlu Sunna wal Jama’a, USA, France, Ethiopia, Türkiye, AMISOM/ATMIS, EUNAVFOR Somalia, Combined Task Force 151, al-Shabaab, ISIS	3
	Government, System		↑
Somalia (Somaliland-SSC Khatumo) -2023-	Internal	Republic of Somaliland, SSC-Khatumo administration (Khatumo State), Puntland State, al-Shabaab	1
	Self-Government, Identity, Territory		↑
South Sudan -2009-	Internationalised internal	Government (SPLM/A), SPLM/A-in Opposition armed group (faction of former vice president, Riek Machar), Kitgwang dissident factions of the SPLA-IO led by Peter Gatdet, Simon Gatwech Dual and Johnson Olony (also known as “Agwalek”), SPLM-FD, SSALA, SSDM/A, SSDM-CF, SSNLM, REMNASA, NAS, SSUF (Paul Malong), communal militias (SSPPF, TFN, White Army, Shilluk Agwelek), Sudan Revolutionary Front armed coalition (SRF, composed of JEM, SLA-AW, SLA-MM and SPLM-N), Non-Signatory South Sudan Opposition Groups (NSSSOG), previously the South Sudan Opposition Movements Alliance (SSOMA, composed of NAS, SSUF/A, Real-SPLM, NDM-PF, UDRM/A, NDM-PF, SSNMC), Sudan, Uganda, UNMISS	3
	Government, Resources, Identity		↓
Sudan -2003- <sup>7</sup>	Internationalised internal	Government (Sudan Armed Forces), Rapid Support Forces (RSF), armed coalition Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF, composed of JEM, SLA-AW, SLA-MM and SPLM-N), several SLA factions, Eastern Sudan Liberation Forces, United Popular Front for Liberation and Justice, Beja National Congress, Beja Armed Congress, community militias, Wagner Group	3
	Government, Self-government, Resources, Identity		↑

- The situation in the Ethiopian region of Tigray was no longer considered an armed conflict in early 2023 due to the positive turn of events, including the significant drop in violence and its impacts and progress in implementing the 2022 agreement. See Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.
- In previous years, two distinct armed conflicts were identified in Sudan: Sudan (Darfur), which began in 2003, and Sudan (South Kordofan and Blue Nile), which started in 2012. Both conflicts, characterised as internationalised internal and motivated by self-government, resources and identity, were analysed jointly in this edition as part of the Sudanese armed conflict. This is because the dynamics of the armed conflict that began in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) affect a large part of the country and particularly the regions of Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile. Irregular armed actors from these regions are also actively involved in the conflict.

Conflict -beginning-	Type	Main parties	Intensity
			Trend
AFRICA			
Western Sahel Region -2018-	International	Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Togo, Benin, Ivory Coast, G5-Sahel Joint Force (Mauritania, Chad, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso), Joint Task Force for the Liptako-Gourma Region (Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso), MINUSMA, France (Operation Barkhane), USA, Takouba Task Force (Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Mali, Netherlands, Niger, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and United Kingdom), Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM or GSIM), Islamic State in the Province of West Africa (ISWAP) - also known as Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)-, Katiba Macina, Ansaroul Islam, other jihadist groups and community militias, Russia, Wagner Group	3
	System, Resources, Identity		↑
AMERICA			
Colombia -1964-	Internationalised internal	Government, ELN, Estado Mayor Central (EMC), Segunda Marquetalia, narco-paramilitary groups	2
	System		=
ASIA			
Afghanistan -2001-	Internationalised internal	Government, National Resistance Front of Afghanistan (NRF), ISIS-KP, Afghanistan Freedom Front (AFF)	2
	System		↓
India (CPI-M) -1967-	Internal	Government, CPI-M (naxalites)	1
	System		=
India (Jammu and Kashmir) -1989-	Internationalised internal	Governments, Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, Jaish-e-Muhammad, United Jihad Council, Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), The Resistance Front (TRF)	1
	Self-government, Identity		↓
Myanmar -1948-	Internationalised internal	Government, armed groups (Ceasefire signatories: ABSDF, ALP, CNF, DKBA, KNU, KNU/KNLA-PC, PNLO, RCSS, NMSP, LDU; Non-signatories: KIA, NDAA, MNDAA, SSPP/SSA, TNLA, AA, UWSA, ARSA, KNPP), PDF	3
	Self-government, Identity		↑
Pakistan -2001-	Internationalised internal	Government, Armed Forces, intelligence services, Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), ISIS-KP	3
	System		↑
Pakistan (Balochistan) -2005-	Internationalised internal	Government, BLA, BNA, BLF and BLT; LeJ, TTP, ISIS-KP	2
	Self-government, Identity, Resources		↑
Philippines (Mindanao) -1991-	Internationalised internal	Government, Abu Sayyaf, BIFF, Islamic State of Lanao/ Dawlay Islamiyah/ Maute Group, Ansarul Khilafah Mindanao, Toraife group, factions of MILF and MNLF	1
	Self-government, System, Identity		↓
Philippines (NPA) -1969-	Internal	Government, NPA	1
	System		=
Thailand (south) -2004-	Internal	Government, BRN and other separatist armed opposition groups	1
	Self-government, Identity		↓
EUROPE			
Türkiye (south-east) -1984-	Internationalised internal	Government, PKK, TAK, ISIS	1
	Self-government, Identity		↓
Russia – Ukraine -2022- <sup>8</sup>	International	Russia, Wagner Group, Donbas militias, Ukraine	3
	Government, Territory		=
MIDDLE EAST			
Egypt (Sinai) -2014-	Internationalised internal	Government, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (ABM) or Sinai Province (branch of ISIS), pro-government militia Union of Sinai Tribes (UST)	1
	System		↓

8. Between 2014 and 2021 the war in eastern Ukraine was analysed as an internationalised internal conflict. See the summary on “Ukraine (east)” in pre-2022 editions of this report.

Conflict -beginning-	Type	Main parties	Intensity
			Trend
MIDDLE EAST			
Iraq -2003-	Internationalised internal	Government, Iraqi military and security forces, Kurdish forces (peshmerga), Shia militias Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) and Saraya Salam, Sunni militias, ISIS, international anti-ISIS coalition led by USA, USA, Iran, Türkiye	3
	System, Government, Identity, Resources		↓
Israel – Hezbollah <sup>9</sup> -2023-	International	Israel, Hezbollah	1
	System, Resources, Territory		↑
Israel – Palestine -2000-	International	Israeli government, settler militias, PA, Fatah (Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades), Hamas (Ezzedin al-Qassam Brigades), Islamic Jihad, FPLP, FDLP, Popular Resistance Committees, Salafists groups, brigades of Jenin, Nablus and Tubas, Lion's Den	3
	Self-government, Identity, Territory		↑
Syria -2011-	Internationalised internal	Government, pro-government militias, Free Syrian Army (FSA), Ahrar alSham, Syrian Democratic Forces (coalition that includes the YPG/YPJ militias of the PYD), Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (formerly al-Nusra Front), Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), ISIS, international anti-ISIS coalition led by USA, Türkiye, Hezbollah, Iran, Russia, Israel	3
	System, Government, Self-government, Identity		↑
Yemen -2004-	Internationalised internal	Armed forces loyal to the internationally recognised Government, followers of the cleric al-Houthi (al-Shabaab al-Mumen/Ansar Allah), tribal militias linked to al-Alhmar clan, Salafist militias (including Happy Yemen Brigades), armed groups linked to the Islamist Islah party, separatist groups under the umbrella of the Southern Transitional Council (STC), Joint Forces (including the Giants Brigades), AQAP, ISIS, international coalition led by Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), USA and military coalition Guardian of Prosperity	3
	System, Government, Identity		↓

1: low intensity; 2: medium intensity; 3: high intensity;

↑: escalation of violence; ↓: decrease of violence ; = : unchanged; End: no longer considered an armed conflict

## 1.1. Armed conflicts: definition

An **armed conflict** is any confrontation between regular or irregular armed groups with objectives that are perceived as incompatible in which the continuous and organised use of violence a) causes a minimum of 100 battle-related deaths in a year and/or a serious impact on the territory (destruction of infrastructures or of natural resources) and human security (e.g. wounded or displaced population, sexual violence, food insecurity, impact on mental health and on the social fabric or disruption of basic services) and b) aims to achieve objectives that are different than those of common delinquency and are normally linked to:

- demands for self-determination and self-government or identity issues;
- the opposition to the political, economic, social or ideological system of a state or the internal or international policy of the government, which in both cases leads to fighting to seize or erode power;
- control over the resources or the territory.

## 1.2. Armed conflicts: analysis of trends in 2023

This section offers an analysis of the global and regional trends in armed conflicts in 2023. This includes an

overview of conflicts as compared to that of previous years, the geographical distribution of conflicts and the main trends by region, the relationship between the actors involved and the scenario of the dispute, the main causes of the current armed conflicts, the general evolution of the contexts and the intensity of the conflicts according to their levels of violence and their impact. Likewise, this section analyses some of the main consequences of armed conflicts in the civilian population, including forced displacement due to situations of conflict and violence.

### 1.2.1 Global and regional trends

In line with the trend observed in 2022, **the number of armed conflicts increased worldwide in 2023**. Thirty-six armed conflicts were identified in total, compared to 33 in 2022 and 32 in 2021. Previously, between 2018 and 2020, there had been 34. **The total number of armed conflicts in 2023 is the highest since 2014. Dynamics of violence caused five new scenarios to be classified as armed conflicts in 2023**, four of them in Africa. In Ethiopia's Amhara region, the federal government's decision to disarm and dissolve the Fano paramilitary militias to integrate them into the Ethiopian Army and the Ethiopian police led to serious clashes between these militias and government forces. In the Horn of Africa,

9. This armed conflict involves and influences other regional actors in different ways. In previous editions of the report, the dynamics of this dispute were analysed in the chapter on Socio-political crises under the title "Israel – Syria – Lebanon". Analyses in recent years have highlighted Iran's growing involvement in this conflict.

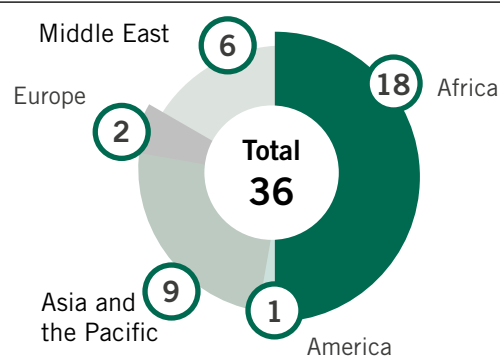


hostilities between the security forces of Somaliland, a self-proclaimed independent region of Somalia whose status remains a matter of dispute, and militias of the Khatumo region, which seeks to become a new state within Somalia, even though it is part of Somaliland, escalated significantly in early 2023 and remained active throughout the year. Meanwhile, in the western part of the DRC, the conflict between the Teke and Yaka communities over land ownership that had begun the previous year in the province of Mai-Ndombe worsened and the violence spread to several neighbouring provinces in 2023. A new armed conflict broke out in Sudan, mainly pitting the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) against the paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The eruption of violence starting in April ended up spreading to a large part of the country and especially to the regions of Darfur, Kordofan and Blue Nile, where local armed groups became actively involved in the hostilities. Therefore, the armed conflicts in these Sudanese regions, which were previously analysed separately in this report, are analysed together in this edition as part of the broader conflict in Sudan. The last new conflict took place in the Middle East, where intensifying tensions caused by the crisis in Gaza opened an especially significant front around the border between Israel and Lebanon. The increase in the magnitude, frequency and scope of the hostilities between Israeli and Hezbollah forces and the impacts of the violence prompted its classification as an armed conflict in late 2023.<sup>10</sup> **Compared to 2022, there was also an armed conflict that ended in 2023:** Ethiopia (Tigray). The significant reduction in violence, the withdrawal of local armed groups and foreign forces and the effective disarmament of combatants after the peace agreement was signed between the federal government of Ethiopia and the political and military authorities of Tigray in November 2022 led us to stop considering this case an armed conflict in 2023.<sup>11</sup>

The geographical distribution of the armed conflicts in 2023 upheld the trend observed in previous periods and the vast majority continued to be concentrated in Africa (18) and Asia and the Pacific (nine), followed by the Middle East (six), Europe (two) and the Americas (one). **Half the armed conflicts in the world (50%) took place in Africa.**

These various armed conflicts were of an internal, internationalised internal and/or international nature. Although most armed conflicts continued to be internationalised internal ones, following the trend of previous years, the number of internal and international conflicts increased in 2023. Seventeen per cent of the armed conflicts were considered internal in 2023, more than in the previous year. Whereas there were

Graph 1.1. Regional distribution of the number of armed conflicts in 2023



four conflicts of this type in 2022, there were six in 2023. The internal conflicts of Ethiopia (Oromia), the Philippines (NPA), India (CPI-M) and Thailand (south) were joined in 2023 by the cases of the DRC (west) and Somalia (Somaliland-SSC-Khatumo). While most internal armed conflicts had previously taken place in Asia, they were distributed equally between Asia and Africa in 2023. Five armed conflicts were international in nature. This was also more than in previous periods, climbing from three in 2022 to five in 2023. The three analysed in 2022 (the armed conflict in the African region of Western Sahel, the Palestinian-Israeli dispute in the Middle East and the war between Russia and Ukraine) were joined by the Israel-Hezbollah conflict, linked to the Gaza crisis, and the conflict in the DRC (east) in 2023. The armed conflict between Israel and the Lebanese militia Hezbollah had been analysed in previous issues of the report as an international socio-political crisis under the heading “Israel-Syria-Lebanon”. Although Israel and Hezbollah are the main parties to the armed conflict, it indirectly involves and impacts other regional actors in various ways. This also includes Iran, which has become increasingly involved in recent years due to its close relationship with Hezbollah, which intensified during the war in Syria. The armed conflict in the DRC (east) dates back to the late 1990s. It had been analysed as an internationalised internal conflict, but in this issue it is considered international due to Rwanda’s direct participation in the hostilities, as verified by a UN Group of Experts.

The rest of the cases (equivalent to 69%, or 25 of 36) were internationalised internal in nature. There were significantly less of these than in previous years, as they accounted for 79% of the armed conflicts in 2022 and 81% in 2021. Though part of the dynamics of these armed conflicts are internal, some of the warring parties are foreign, the armed actors in the conflict have bases or launch attacks from abroad and/or the

10. Ibid.

11. See chapter 2 (Peace negotiations in Africa) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

fighting has spilled over to neighbouring countries. In many conflicts, this internationalisation involved third parties as combatants, including international missions, ad-hoc regional and international military coalitions, states, cross-border armed groups, international private security companies and others.

Following the trend of previous years, United Nations international peacekeeping missions continued to play a role in 2023, especially in armed conflicts in Africa. During 2023, UN missions remained operational in the CAR (MINUSCA), South Sudan (UNSMISS), Mali (MINUSMA) and the DRC (MONUSCO). Several of these missions encountered many problems, however, leading MINUSMA AND MONUSCO to start their withdrawal or total departure.

The most notable case was that of MINUSMA, the UN mission that left Mali in late 2023 after a decade and after suffering the second-most deaths in UN mission history. The Malian government's announcement that the mission was ending led to the first armed clashes in the country between the parties that signed the 2015 peace agreement, especially in the north, where there were also struggles for control of the MINUSMA bases. These events had been preceded by the deterioration of diplomatic relations between the Malian military junta and its former allies after it approached Russia and the Russian private security company Wagner Group in 2022. The MONUSCO mission also began to withdraw in early 2024 at the DRC government's request. Two thousand peacekeepers left the country in the first phase, amidst protests against the mission and criticism of its passivity in the face of escalating violence. Along similar lines, the severe security crisis in Sudan in 2023 led the UN Security Council to decide to end the mandate of the Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) in December, despite its political and non-military nature, and ordered the closure of its operations by the first quarter of 2024.

In recent years, a new trend has been emerging that culminated in the closure or announcement of closure of various bilateral and multilateral operations in Africa in 2023. In addition to the withdrawal of three major UN missions in sub-Saharan Africa, two of them with peacekeeping mandates (Mali and the DRC) and another providing political assistance (Sudan), the European Union and French missions in the Western Sahel also began or completed their withdrawal. The scheduled closure of the AU mission in Somalia (ATMIS) and the dissolution of the G5 Sahel regional anti-jihadist coalition

*Although most armed conflicts continued to be internationalised internal, the number of internal and international cases increased*

also began after Burkina Faso and Niger announced their withdrawal from the alliance in December 2023, following the path previously taken by Mali. The two remaining members, Mauritania and Chad, recognised that the departure of three of the five founding members of the alliance created in 2014 represented its de facto dissolution. This dynamic owes to several factors. The first factor is the geopolitical tension between the West and Russia stemming from the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Secondly, there is a component of appropriation in response to the changes in leadership of some West African countries through coups d'état in recent years, where the pressures and double standards of regional and international organisations led to rejection of the international community and especially France as a postcolonial regional enforcer within the framework of *Françafrique*. Thirdly, citizens of these countries (rather questionably) believe that these missions have failed to achieve their aims after years of uninterrupted activity in Africa. The CAR and Chad are also no strangers to this trend, which is behind demonstrations to reject the West, more or less politically exploited or even instigated by foreign countries.

**Regional organisations continued to be involved in many armed conflicts** in the form military missions or operations. Examples include the European Union's EUNAVFOR mission in Somalia and the mission of the South African Development Council (SADC) in Mozambique, SAMIM. In collaboration with Rwandan troops, SAMIM expanded its activity to Cabo Delgado in 2022. In 2023, it played a major role in reducing violence caused by the jihadist insurgency<sup>12</sup> in this region of Mozambique. The SADC also created a mission in the DRC (SAMIDRC, composed of troops from South Africa, Malawi and Tanzania) in 2023 to replace the EAC mission in the DRC, which had been criticised for its passivity throughout the year and withdrew from the country at the government's request in December. **Different hybrid missions also remained active in 2023**, involving regional organisations and states. For example, the maritime military operation Combined Task Force 151, which operates in the Horn of Africa and the Indian Ocean, was active in Somalia. Led by the United States, it works together with the European mission EUNAVFOR. A similar hybrid international effort is the Global Coalition Against Daesh. Established in 2014, this anti-Islamic State coalition is led by the United States and joined by 87 actors in total, including the EU and the Arab League. Though initially focused on Iraq and Syria, the coalition is now also active in West Africa due to the rising activity of jihadist groups there.

12. The concept of jihad has and has historically had multiple connotations. The term implies the idea of "effort" and many Muslims and scholars of Islam reject its use to describe armed groups because they consider that they use a religious concept to justify illegitimate violence. Taking into account these debates and, at the same time, the widespread use of the term in the field of international relations and peace and security studies, this report refers to "groups with jihadist agendas" when it is the armed organizations themselves that in their narratives and declaration of intentions they appeal to their particular interpretation of Islamic precepts.



**Third-party involvement** remained a factor in many internationalised internal conflicts and made many of them more complex. In Yemen, for example, given the rise in armed attacks by the Houthis in the Red Sea and their attacks on Israel in retaliation for the Israeli military offensive in Gaza, the US became militarily involved. Thus, in December 2023, Washington announced the establishment of an international military operation in the area, which is key for global maritime trade, with the declared intention of stopping the Houthis' actions. Other countries participating in Operation Prosperity Guardian include the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Greece, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Singapore and Sri Lanka. This dynamic of confrontation added uncertainty to the prospects for a negotiated solution in Yemen in a year of intensified dialogue between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis.<sup>13</sup> Iran continued to be actively involved in armed conflicts in the Middle East through its support for Bashar Assad's regime in Syria, its relationships with friendly militias in Iraq and its political, logistical and/or military support for other actors in the region, like the Houthis and the Palestinian group Hamas. **Demonstrating the internationalisation and interrelation of various armed conflicts in the region, the crisis in Gaza also intensified attacks against US targets in Iraq and Syria, as well as Israel and the United States' attacks in these two countries against actors in Iran's orbit calling themselves the "axis of resistance"**. Meanwhile, in line with the dynamics observed in previous years, Türkiye continued its military campaign against the Kurdish armed group PKK through cross-border attacks against its positions in northern Iraq. Many non-state armed actors also conducted cross-border offensives, such as the Houthis in their attacks against Israel and against vessels bound for Israel in the Red Sea. The different factions of Boko Haram continued to operate in the Lake Chad basin in 2023, which encompasses land in Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and Chad. The battle for supremacy in the region intensified between Boko Haram and ISWAP, a branch of ISIS in West Africa that also operates in several countries in the area.

**Regarding the role of private security companies, the Russian Wagner Group** was involved in at least seven armed conflicts on several continents, but mainly in Africa. In 2023, the organisation was active in Libya, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, the CAR, Sudan, Russia-Ukraine and Syria. In Syria, it fought against members of ISIS in support of Syrian government forces. In Mali, it also fought alongside the government and local security forces against several Arab and Tuareg armed groups. In the war between Ukraine and Russia, the Wagner Group played a particularly significant role around Bakhmut (Donetsk region), one of the most active fronts in 2023 and where it acknowledged having suffered around 20,000 casualties. In June 2023, after months of tension and disagreements with the Russian

authorities, the Wagner Group led a military uprising against Moscow. The mutiny was dismantled and the organisation's leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, died two months later when the plane in which he was travelling crashed. The crash was blamed on Moscow. **Wagner's rebellion and its consequences ended up having impacts on the operations of the group's militias**. For example, the situation led to the withdrawal of hundreds of the organisation's mercenaries who were deployed in the CAR.

The **multi-causal nature of contemporary armed conflicts** was confirmed in 2023. Following the trend of previous years, **the main causes of most of the conflicts (26 of the 36, equivalent to 72%) included questioning of the political, economic, social or ideological system of the state and/or disputes about the domestic or international policies of the respective governments**. In line with recent trends, disputes about the system drove 19 of the 36 armed conflicts (53%) in 2023. In most cases, they were related to jihadist armed actors with political agendas based on their particular interpretation of Islamic law. These groups include Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region, the Pakistani Taliban's TTP militias and the different groups that have claimed to be branches and/or "provinces" of ISIS beyond its area of origin in Iraq and Syria, in places such as the Lake Chad region, Somalia, Libya, Egypt (Sinai), Afghanistan, Pakistan, Pakistan (Balochistan), the Philippines (Mindanao) and Yemen. In Libya, Egypt (Sinai) and the Philippines (Mindanao), these groups' operations have fallen significantly compared to previous years. In three other cases (Colombia, the Philippines (NPA) and India (CPI-M)), disputes about the system were associated with other kinds of insurgencies, ideologically linked to communism and Maoism. Fourteen of the 36 armed conflicts (39%) were caused by the domestic or international policies of the respective governments, leading to struggles to erode or access power. One such case was the armed conflict in Libya, which continued to feature power struggles between rival governments. Others included the conflicts in the CAR, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

Armed conflicts were also primarily caused by disputes over identity and/or demands for self-government. These were behind 21 of the 36 armed conflicts in 2023, or 58%. In line with previous years, identity-related disputes were more significant than demands for self-government, as the former were identified in 22 conflicts (61% of the total), compared to 14 for the latter (39%). Identity-related aspirations were relevant in new armed conflicts in Africa in 2023. For example, they were linked to Amhara nationalist claims in Ethiopia, to the interest of the SSC-Khatumo administration to become a new state of Somalia as part of the historical dispute over border regions between Somaliland and Puntland and to the clashes and power struggles between the

13. For more information, see the summary on Yemen in chapter 6 (Peace negotiations in the Middle East) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

Teke and Yaka communities in the DRC (west). Other armed conflicts related to self-government and/or identity took place in Cameroon (Ambazonia/North West and South West), Ethiopia (Oromia), Ethiopia (Tigray), Mali, Mozambique (north), the Western Sahel region, the DRC (east), Sudan, the Philippines (Mindanao), India (Jammu and Kashmir), Myanmar, Pakistan (Balochistan), Thailand (south), Türkiye (south-east), Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Syria and Yemen.

Finally, many armed conflicts were mainly caused by control of territory and/or resources. These factors were identified in 15 of the 36 conflicts (42%). Between the two, struggles for resources were more important, as they were behind one third (33%) of the armed conflicts in 2023. In line with previous years, **the conflicts that involved disputes over resources mainly took place in Africa, though this factor also had an indirect effect in many conflicts in other regions, perpetuating violence through war economies.** Throughout 2023, disputes around these issues were relevant in the conflict in the Lake Chad region, which pitted Boko Haram against the ISIS branch, ISWAP; in Libya, where multiple armed groups struggled over the control of resources and territory; and in the CAR, where the Sudanese Rapid Support Forces (RSF) received mining exploitation rights in exchange for fighting against armed groups. The DRC (east) continued to be an iconic scene of armed conflict with an important background linked to the control of resources. In 2023, widespread violence increased the illegal exploitation of natural resources and control procedures collapsed in various mining sites, leading to an increase in smuggling to Rwanda. Areas of mining activity also tended to be scenes of violence in Pakistan (Balochistan), where another armed conflict was partially motivated by a dispute over resources, and in India, as part of the conflict involving the Naxalite insurgency. Issues linked to the control of territory were found in five armed conflicts (14% of the total) and were especially significant in the case of Palestine-Israel. The Israeli military offensive in Gaza and the operations of the Israeli security forces and attacks by Jewish settlers in the West Bank, which led to massive forced displacements and expulsions of the population, were described as attempts at ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian population to consolidate Israeli control over the territory. These policies were also accompanied by many authorisations for new settlements in the West Bank. The territorial issue was also key in the dispute between Israel and Hezbollah, with hostilities concentrated on the de facto border between Israel and Lebanon.

Our analysis indicates a significant increase in **armed conflicts trending towards higher levels of violence and instability in 2023. Forty-two per cent of the armed**

**Forty-two per cent of the armed conflicts worsened, with rising levels of violence in 2023**

**conflicts worsened**, significantly more than the 30% that deteriorated in 2022. **The armed conflicts that got worse were in Africa** (Burundi, Ethiopia (Amhara), Mali, the Western Sahel region, the DRC (east), the DRC (west), Somalia, Somalia (Somaliland – SCC-Khatumo) and Sudan), **in Asia** (Myanmar, Pakistan and Pakistan (Balochistan)) **and in the Middle East** (Israel-Palestine, Israel-Hezbollah and Syria). In some conflicts, an escalation of violence put an end to ceasefire agreements that had been in force for years. In Mali, the ceasefire had lasted years and in Pakistan it was broken after several months. The rest of the armed conflicts were split more or less evenly between those with levels of hostilities and violence similar to those in 2022 (10 conflicts, equivalent to 28%) and those with comparatively lower levels (11 conflicts, accounting for 30%). In some of the conflicts that saw less fighting, the trend was linked to some armed actors' apparent weakening and decline in activity as a result of the dynamics of the hostilities. This was true of the conflict

in Mozambique (north), where there was a notable drop in the associated death toll and in the number of attacks targeting civilians, but also in the Philippines (Mindanao) and Egypt (Sinai). In other conflicts, the decrease in fighting was linked to the impact of negotiating processes and peace or ceasefire agreements, such as in Ethiopia (Tigray), which was no longer considered an armed conflict in 2023 due to the course of events after the peace agreement was signed in November 2022, and in Yemen, where the ceasefire agreement signed in 2022 was de facto maintained and negotiating channels remained active between the main actors involved in the hostilities.<sup>14</sup> In many of these conflicts, the relative de-escalation and/or reduction in violence compared to 2022 occurred alongside persistent humanitarian crises and forced displacement associated with the conflict and other serious human rights violations, as illustrated by the conflicts in South Sudan and Afghanistan, with especially serious violations of women's rights in the latter. The conflicts in Egypt (Sinai) and Thailand (south) continued to be considered armed conflicts despite the fact that the body count fell below the threshold of 100 per year due to the relative dip in violence in 2023, which seemed to be more related to circumstantial issues in Thailand (south) and to signs of the withdrawal (but not the disappearance) of armed groups linked to ISIS in Egypt (Sinai). In Egypt, the crisis in Gaza added even more uncertainty about the future security situation in Sinai.

In 2023, the **most intense armed conflicts** continued to account for 47% of the total. **Thus the trend observed in recent years was maintained and there was an increase in the percentage of high-intensity conflicts**, characterised by high levels of lethality (over 1,000 fatalities per year), in addition to serious impacts on the population, mass

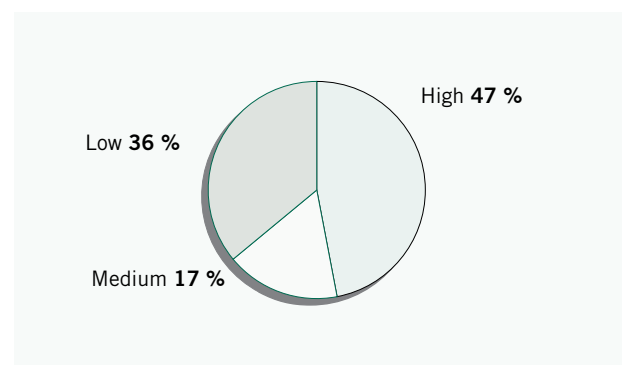
14. For more information, see chapter 6 (Peace negotiations in the Middle East) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

forced displacement and severe consequences on the ground. If we consider the data since 2011 (see Graph 1.4), high-intensity armed conflicts once accounted for less than one third of all conflicts worldwide, except in 2016 and 2017, when they stood at 40%. Since 2020, the percentage of high-intensity conflicts around the world has increased, reaching around half the total: 47% in 2020, 53% in 2021, 52% in 2022 and 47% in 2023. Therefore, in 2023 they were slightly fewer than in 2022, but the trend was upheld overall. In line with what was observed in previous years, the highest proportion of high-intensity conflicts raged in Africa with 10 out of 17, meaning 59% worldwide. This is less than in 2022, when 70% of the high-intensity conflicts took place in Africa. Ten of the 18 armed conflicts in Africa were of high intensity (55%), a significant decrease from the 75% in 2022 and the 80% in 2021. The region with the second-highest number of high-intensity armed conflicts was the Middle East, with four, accounting for 23% of the world total and two thirds (67%) of the armed conflicts in the region (four of six). In Asia, the number of high-intensity armed conflicts doubled from one to two over the previous year, while in Europe there was still only one (50% of the conflicts there) and there were none in the Americas. **The 17 high-intensity armed conflicts in 2023 were:** Ethiopia (Amhara), Ethiopia (Oromia), Mali, Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram), Western Sahel region, DRC (East), DRC (East-ADF), Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Myanmar, Pakistan, Russia-Ukraine, Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Syria and Yemen.

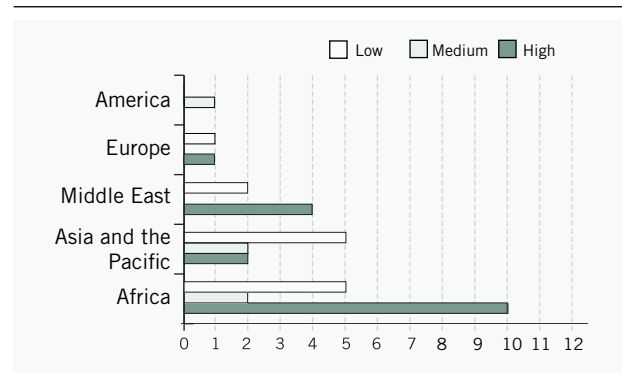
As in previous years, **some of the high-intensity armed conflicts presented a pattern of hostilities and dynamics of violence that cost well above the threshold of a thousand lives per year**, in addition to other serious impacts on human security and repercussions on infrastructure and on the ground. In the **DRC**, for example, the escalation of violence in the five eastern provinces of the country (Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu, Maniema and Tanganyika) killed almost 3,500 people. The resumption of the war in northern **Mali** contributed to an increase in violence in the country that caused more than 4,000 deaths. In **Somalia**, the intensification of attacks by jihadist groups contributed to an annual death toll of almost 8,000 victims. The outbreak of a new armed conflict in **Sudan** in April pitting the Sudanese Armed Forces against the paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and involving other armed actors killed more than 13,000 people across the country in 2023, especially in the capital and in the states of the Darfur region. A similar death toll was caused by violence in the **Western Sahel region**, in what is known as the “three borders” area (Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger), where around 13,500 people died in 2023. An even higher body count was reported in **Myanmar**, where over 15,000 people lost their lives in 2023, especially starting in October with the escalation of clashes between Burmese security forces and different ethnic armed groups. In the war between **Russia and Ukraine**, some cited nearly 2,000

***In 2023, almost half (47%) the armed conflicts in the world were of high intensity***

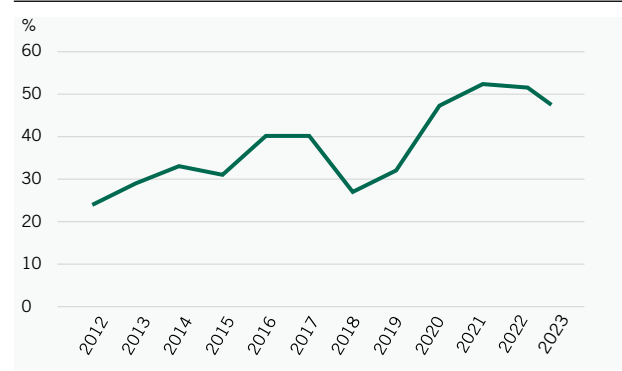
Graph 1.2. Intensity of the armed conflicts in 2023



Graph 1.3. Intensity of the armed conflicts by region



Graph 1.4. Percentage of high intensity armed conflicts in the last decade



civilian deaths due to the violence of the conflict, acknowledging that the real figure could be higher, while others estimated that over 30,000 people in total had died during the year, including civilians and combatants.

The armed conflicts in the Middle East continued to be very bloody, with over 6,000 deaths in **Syria** in 2023 and more than 3,000 in **Yemen**. These are high figures, but comparatively much lower than those reported in the worst years of these conflicts, as in Syria they surpassed 50,000 in 2016 and 2015 and 70,000 in 2014, and in Yemen they held steady at around 20,000 in 2019, 2020 and 2021. The **Israel-Palestine** conflict deserves

### Box 1.1. Regional trends in armed conflict

<b>AFRICA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Following the trend of previous years, Africa had the highest number of armed conflicts worldwide with 18, accounting for 50% of the total.</li> <li>The proportion of high-intensity armed conflicts in Africa fell significantly from 75% in 2022 to 55% in 2023 (10 of 18).</li> <li>Half the armed conflicts in the region (9 of 18) worsened over the previous year; while the situation in six conflicts did not change. A significant decrease in violence was observed in three conflicts, including in Ethiopia (Tigray), which was no longer considered an armed conflict in 2023.</li> <li>The vast majority of the armed conflicts in Africa were internationalised internal in nature (13 of 18, or 72%), while the conflicts in the Western Sahel region and in the DRC (east) were international. The remaining three were purely internal: Ethiopia (Oromia), Ethiopia (Amhara) and the DRC (west). The last two of these three were new armed conflicts in 2023.</li> </ul>
<b>AMERICA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There was only one armed conflict in the Americas, in Colombia, one of the longest-lasting in the world.</li> <li>In 2023, the armed conflict in Colombia remained at medium intensity, with relatively high levels of violence despite the ceasefire agreements that the government has reached with several active armed groups and the negotiations with the ELN and EMC.</li> <li>Although only one armed conflict was reported in the Americas, the region continued to report very high levels of violence as a result of other dynamics of tension and crime and stood out for its high homicide rates.<sup>15</sup></li> </ul>
<b>ASIA AND THE PACIFIC</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>After Africa, Asia had the second-highest number of armed conflicts, with nine in total (25%).</li> <li>There were two high-intensity armed conflicts in Asia in 2023 (Myanmar and Pakistan) and two of medium intensity (Afghanistan and Pakistan (Balochistan)), yet most (five of nine) were of low intensity. Some of the low-intensity conflicts are decades old, like those in the Philippines (NPA) and India (CPI-M).</li> <li>Most of the armed conflicts in Asia witnessed lower or similar levels of violence compared to the previous year (four and two, respectively). One third of the armed conflicts worsened: the two high-intensity ones in Myanmar and Pakistan and the other conflict in Pakistan (Balochistan).</li> <li>Asia continued to stand out for its internal armed conflicts. One third of the armed conflicts in Asia (three of nine) were of this kind: the Philippines (NPA), India (CPI-M) and Thailand (south).</li> </ul>
<b>EUROPE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Europe was the scene of two armed conflicts, Russia-Ukraine and Türkiye (south-east), accounting for 5% of all conflicts worldwide.</li> <li>The armed conflict caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine presented high levels of violence similar to those of the previous year. In Türkiye (south-east), there was a notable drop in the death toll associated with the hostilities between government forces and the PKK. This decrease was partly linked to the PKK's unilateral cessation of hostilities in response to the serious earthquake that shook the region.</li> </ul>
<b>MIDDLE EAST</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Six armed conflicts were reported in the region, one more than the previous year, due to the escalation of violence between Israel and Hezbollah linked to the Gaza crisis. Armed conflicts in the Middle East accounted for 17% of the world total.</li> <li>The Middle East was the region with the second-highest number of high-intensity armed conflicts, trailing Africa. Proportionally, it was the area most affected in the world by high-intensity conflict. Four of the six conflicts in the region (67%) were of high intensity in 2023.</li> <li>Violence ebbed in half the conflicts compared to previous years. The other half escalated, and this was especially significant in the conflict in Israel-Palestine.</li> </ul>

special mention after the steep escalation in violence starting in the last quarter of 2023. The unprecedented attack by Hamas and other Palestinian groups on 7 October and the subsequent Israeli military offensive on the Gaza Strip led to the death of more than 34,000 people in just three months: nearly 1,200 in Israel (including both Israelis and foreigners) and 33,000 in Gaza, with 25,000 confirmed dead and another 8,000 buried under the rubble, in addition to over 500 other Palestinian deaths in the West Bank throughout of the year. This conflict stands out not only for its very serious impacts on civilians, as the Israeli military operation in Gaza became a form of collective punishment and was increasingly described as genocide (see the next section), but also for the extraordinary magnitude of the violence and destruction in a limited period of time. Israel used weapons with enormous destructive potential in Gaza, wreaking havoc in a territory covering only 365 square kilometres that is among the most

densely populated in the world. **At the end of the year, analysts warned that the daily death rate in Gaza due to the Israeli offensive was higher than that of any other armed conflict in the world in the 21st century.**

### 1.2.2. Impact of conflicts on the civilian population

In line with what was observed in previous years, and as both the United Nations and other international and local organisations have insistently reported, the civilian population continued to suffer very serious consequences from the armed conflicts in 2023. The impacts of the armed conflicts were also interrelated with other crises, such as the climate emergency, food insecurity and inequality, aggravating the violations of rights and the general situation of human security in these contexts. The annual report of the UN Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict,

15. See the section on the Americas in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises).



published in May 2023 and analysing the events of 2022, confirmed the consequences that death, injury, forced disappearance, torture, rape and forced displacement had for civilians. The report also asserted that the destruction of essential health, power, sanitation and water infrastructure deprived many thousands of people of access to basic services to survive.

The report also warned of the **impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, with devastating effects on the civilian population**. Thus, the highest number of civilian victims of these weapons in 2022 were in Ukraine, followed by Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria. The use of antipersonnel mines was also documented in the conflicts in the CAR, Colombia, the DRC, Myanmar, Ukraine and Yemen, and cluster bombs were used in Ukraine. In late 2022, Syria and Iraq suffered from extensive contamination of remnants of explosives. In Iraq, it was estimated that explosive devices were responsible for a third of civilian casualties. The analysis of armed conflicts in 2023 in this issue of the *Alert!* report illustrate how this problem has persisted and worsened in many conflicts. In Colombia, the use of antipersonnel mines continued to claim lives. In Ukraine, long-range explosive weapons were responsible for 84% of civilian deaths and 95% of civilian injuries. **One of the most notorious and symbolic cases of this in 2023 was that of Gaza, due to the use of weapons with enormous destructive potential in a densely populated area with no way out for the population.** During the first few months of the Israeli campaign, the Israeli Army dropped 25,000 tonnes of bombs on Gaza, equivalent to two nuclear bombs. Many of the various targets were identified via artificial intelligence systems. Israel also reportedly used weapons prohibited in populated areas, such as white phosphorus. As a result of these indiscriminate and deliberate attacks, the intensification of the blockade, the denial of access to humanitarian aid, including the use of hunger as a weapon of war, and the systematic destruction of civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, more than 33,000 people had died in Gaza by the end of the year, 70% of them women and children. The Israeli attacks also led to the deaths of more than a hundred journalists and humanitarian workers.

**Faced with these continuous and systematic violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), some warned of the erosion of the international system to protect civilians and of double standards when punishing those responsible for these types of violations.**<sup>16</sup> These serious impacts of armed violence on civilians in many conflicts also occurred amidst **growing militarisation and increased military spending worldwide**. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), a benchmark in this area, found that military spending had increased for the ninth consecutive year to reach 2.44 trillion USD in 2023.<sup>17</sup>

Armed conflicts also caused and/or worsened humanitarian crises and continued to be one of the main factors behind hunger crises in the world due to the destruction of crops, agricultural machinery and soil contamination with explosives. The rise in the prices of food, fuel and fertilisers, greatly influenced by the war between Russia and Ukraine, in addition to the effects of climate change, aggravated civilians' needs in many contexts. As part of the war between Russia and Ukraine, the explosion of the Kakhovka dam in Kherson (in an area occupied by Russia in southern Ukraine) caused an ecological and humanitarian catastrophe, flooding large areas, contaminating water, displacing explosive mines and causing extensive damage to agricultural areas. **Some armed conflicts were interrelated with phenomena such as climate change caused by human activity and natural disasters, which helped to worsen the situations faced by civilians** and especially had an impact on people's living conditions. In 2023, the dynamics of violence in Somalia deteriorated alongside the worse drought in decades in the country, followed by the largest floods in several generations. This combination of factors led to a deterioration in the humanitarian situation and an increase in levels of food insecurity. In Libya, torrential rains caused by a storm (Daniel) and linked to climate change led to the destruction of a dam and the death and disappearance of thousands of people in Derna (east), in a context marked by the impacts of the armed conflict, the persistent institutional fracture and serious governance problems. The humanitarian situation caused by the prolonged armed conflict in Colombia was also aggravated by the effects of climate change in 2023, due to droughts and floods that affected different areas. A similar situation was observed in Myanmar, considered one of the countries at highest risk of extreme weather events. In Syria, the interrelation between armed conflict and natural disasters was evident in the impacts of the earthquake that shook the region and Türkiye in February. The earthquake especially affected northwestern Syria, which is controlled by the opposition and home to hundreds of thousands of people internally displaced due to the armed conflict. The Syrian regime attempted to control and politically exploit humanitarian aid to the region, widely described as insufficient by multiple actors.

The armed conflicts also continued to have **specific impacts on some population groups**. In his periodic reports on the consequences of conflicts on civilians, the UN Secretary-General warned of **the disproportionate effects suffered by older people, who often cannot leave areas affected by hostilities** and are forced to face increased risk of death, injury or lack of access to basic services or support networks. The UN Secretary-General's periodic report on children and armed conflict published in mid-2023, covering events in 2022, noted a rise in the number of serious violations against boys and girls.<sup>18</sup>

16. See "Gaza, the erosion of international humanitarian law and the future of the global order" in chapter 5 (Risk scenarios).

17. SIPRI, "Global military spending surges amid war, rising tensions and insecurity", Press Release, 22 April 2024.

18. UN Secretary-General, *Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict*, A/77/895-S/2023/363, 5 June 2023.

While 23,982 serious violations had been confirmed in 2021, 27,180 were documented in 2022, 24,300 of which were committed over the course of 2022 and 2,880 had been perpetrated before, but were finally verified in 2022. These violations affected nearly 19,000 minors, most of which were children, in 24 contexts. The report asserts that the information provided does not reflect all the violations committed against boys and girls in armed conflicts worldwide, but it does outline the trends of the most serious violations. Therefore, **the most serious violations committed against boys and girls included murder, mutilation, recruitment, kidnapping and detention due to their real or imagined connection with armed groups. Gender norms shaped the minors' exposure to these impacts.** As such, boys continued to be most affected by recruitment, mutilation and abduction, while girls were disproportionately affected by sexual violence related to the armed conflicts. The report warned of the particular impact on boys and girls in 2022 in Myanmar, where the hostilities contributed to a 140% rise in serious violations, in South Sudan, where the dynamics of violence caused 135% more serious violations against minors, and the Western Sahel region, where serious violations rose by 85%. Other armed conflicts that saw more violations against minors in 2022 were in Colombia, Israel-Palestine, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Syria and Sudan. The UN-backed truce reached in Yemen in 2022 helped to lower such violations by 40%, underscoring the importance of peace work to guarantee children's safety. On a positive note, nearly 12,500 minors previously linked to armed forces or groups received protection or support for their reintegration in 2022.

*In just three months in Gaza, nearly 10,000 Palestinian girls and boys died as a result of Israel's offensive, more than all the minors who have lost their lives in armed conflicts worldwide since 2019*

**The trend of the armed conflicts in 2023 indicates persistent abuse and human rights violations against minors in multiple contexts.** Boys and girls were directly affected by attacks in Burundi, Myanmar, Ukraine, Syria and elsewhere. In Syria, 307 minors died in various acts of violence in 2023, raising to 24,000 the total number of boys and girls who have lost their lives in the conflict since it started in 2011. In just the last three months of 2023 in Gaza, nearly 10,000 Palestinian girls and boys died as a result of Israel's offensive, more than all the minors who have lost their lives in armed conflicts worldwide since 2019. Thousands of other children were injured and/or underwent operations without anaesthesia, including amputations, and faced serious consequences for their mental health due to persistent attacks, continued insecurity, the loss of their parents and other relatives and the severe humanitarian crisis. Several Israeli minors were also taken hostage by Hamas on 7 October and Palestinian minors were also deprived of liberty under the controversial figure of administrative detention. There was an increase in

armed groups' recruitment and use of girls and boys in several conflicts. In Colombia, for example, 251 minors were affected in 2023, an increase of 93% over 2022. In 2023, there were also warnings of the increased recruitment of minors in Yemen by the Houthis and the use of children by tribal militias supporting Egyptian government forces in their fight against ISIS in Sinai. In northeastern Syria, over 51,000 people, mostly women and children under 12 years of age, remained in the al-Hawl and Roj refugee camps due to their links to ISIS.

As in previous years, **sexual violence** continued to be perpetrated in many armed conflicts. The annual report of the UN Secretary-General on sexual violence in armed conflicts published in 2023, which documents and analyses events that occurred in 2022, noted some especially worrying trends and warned of the **serious effects of the use of sexual violence in Ukraine, Afghanistan, Mali, Myanmar, Sudan, the DRC, Ethiopia, Haiti and South Sudan.**<sup>19</sup> The report identified 49 actors as perpetrators of sexual violence in different conflicts, most of them non-state armed groups, although cases involving the national armed forces and security forces were also reported. The report states that 70% of these actors are considered persistent perpetrators, appearing on the list for five years or more and failing to take any corrective or reparatory action. Sexual violence was used as part of political and repressive violence in different armed conflicts and socio-political crises and was one of the causes of forced displacement. In that way, it also affected previous displaced populations given the vulnerability faced by women forced to leave their places of origin.

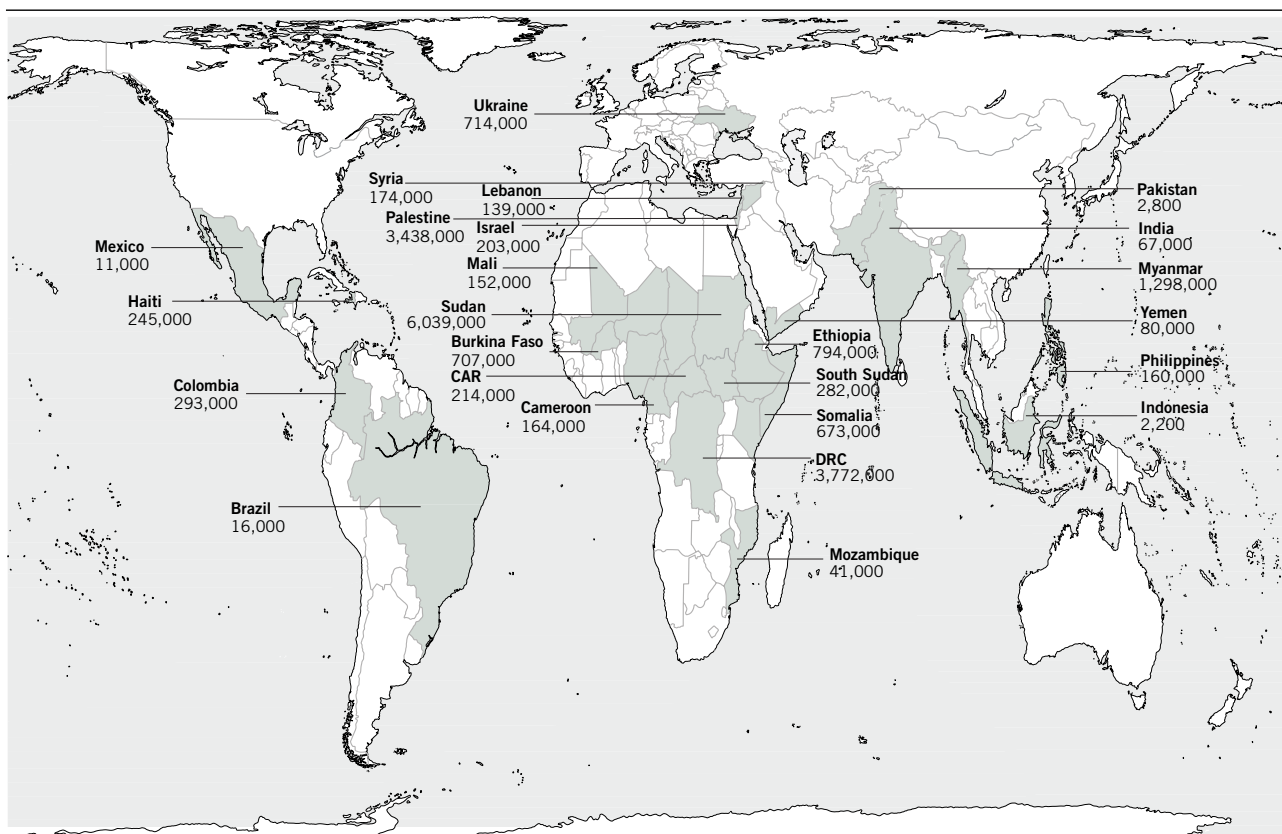
In 2023, the year that marked the 15th anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1820, which kicked off a series of resolutions specifically focused on sexual violence as part of the international agenda on women, peace and security, the information available indicated that the problem persisted in many contexts. In Somalia, rates of sexual violence continued to climb, following a worsening trend that has particularly intensified since 2020. Sexual violence also continued in the various armed conflicts taking place in the DRC, where armed actors such as the ADF maintained their systematic abuse of kidnapped girls and women as sex slaves. In the war between Russia and Ukraine, various actors continued to report and document the use of sexual violence in 2023, mainly perpetrated by Russian forces. In 2023, there were also warnings about sexual violence in South Sudan and Yemen. Overall, the United Nations reported that between 70% and 90% of all episodes of sexual violence in armed conflicts occur with the use of light weapons, confirming the need to address the impacts of these types of arms.<sup>20</sup>

19. UN Secretary-General, *Conflict-related sexual violence. Report of the Secretary-General*, S/2023/413, 22 June 2023.

20. Ibid.



Map 1.2. Countries with the highest numbers of internal displacements due to conflict and violence in 2023



Source: Map prepared by the authors on the basis of the data provided in Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2024*, 14 May, 2024.

**Forced displacement** continued to be one of the most flagrant and dramatic effects of the armed conflicts, compromising the lives of millions of people around the world. According to data gathered by the United Nations agency for refugees (UNHCR), the phenomenon only worsened in 2023, once again breaking record numbers. In the first half of 2023,<sup>21</sup> 110 million people had been forcibly displaced inside or outside the borders of their countries as a result of conflicts, violence, persecution and human rights violations. Of this total, 36.4 million people were refugees, 62.5 million were internally displaced, 6.1 million were asylum seekers and another 5.3 million were categorised as people in need of international protection.<sup>22</sup> In mid-2023, more than half (52%) the world's **refugees** came from just three countries torn by armed conflict: Syria (6.5 million people), Afghanistan (6.1 million) and Ukraine (5.9 million). Syria continued to have the largest refugee and internally displaced populations, as it has for a decade, with a total of 13.3 million people. It is estimated that 88% of the total forcibly displaced population worldwide lived in low- and middle-income countries.

Considering the drift of events in various scenarios during the second half of the year, the accumulated

*The worst forced displacement crisis in 2023 occurred in Sudan, where escalating violence since April forced more than 7.5 million people to leave their homes*

numbers of forcibly displaced people worldwide were expected to be even higher by the end of 2023.

Yearly data from various armed conflicts indicated this trend. Thus, the UNHCR reported that more than 3.1 million people had been forcibly displaced due to violence around Lake Chad. Since the violence intensified in Sudan in April and until the end of 2023, more than 7.5 million people were displaced due to the conflict in what was shaping up to be the worst displacement crisis of 2023. Affected by various armed conflicts, the DRC was also considered as having one of the worst humanitarian and displacement crises in 2023 according

to the IOM, with seven million people displaced as a result of violence. UNHCR's partial assessment was also prepared before the crisis in the Gaza Strip, where the Israeli military offensive had forcibly displaced 1.7 million people by the close of 2023. Although this figure is lower than in other conflicts, it accounts for the forced displacement of over 75% of the total population of Gaza (2.3 million people) to increasingly smaller areas in the midst of incessant bombing in just three months. In the last quarter of the year, hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah arising from the crisis in Gaza also forcibly displaced 100,000 Israelis who were

21. Only global data for the first half of 2023 was available when this report went to press.

22. UNHCR, *Mid-Year Trends 2023*, 25 October 2023.

evacuated indefinitely by the authorities from areas bordering Lebanon starting in October. Another 50,000 people in Lebanon were also forced to move.

According to IDMC's annual report, which focuses on the situation of the internally displaced population, by the end of 2023 a total of 68 million people had left their homes due to conflict and violence, a figure that has increased by 49% in the last five years. Conflicts and violence would have motivated internal population movements of more than 20 million people in 45 countries and territories in 2023. Sudan, DRC and Palestine represent almost two thirds of this total (see map 1.2).

## 1.3. Armed conflicts: annual evolution

### 1.3.1. Africa

#### Great Lakes and Central Africa

Burundi	
<b>Start:</b>	2015
<b>Type:</b>	Government Internationalised internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Government, Imbonerakure youth wing, political party CNDD-FDD, political party CNL, armed groups RED-TABARA, FPB (previously FOREBU), FNL
<b>Intensity:</b>	1
<b>Trend:</b>	↑

#### Summary:

The process of political and institutional transition that got under way with the signing of the Arusha Peace Agreement in 2000 was formally completed in 2005. The approval of a new constitution (that formalises the distribution of political and military power between the main two communities, the Hutu and Tutsi) and the holding of elections (leading to the formation of a new government), represent an attempted to lay the foundations for overcoming a conflict that began in 1993. This represented the principal opportunity for ending the ethnic-political violence that has plagued the country since its independence in 1962. However, the authoritarian evolution of the government after the 2010 elections, denounced as fraudulent by the opposition, has overshadowed the reconciliation process and led to the mobilization of political opposition. This situation has been aggravated by the plans to reform the Constitution by the Government. The deteriorating situation in the country is revealed by the institutional deterioration and reduction of the political space for the opposition, the controversial candidacy of Nkurunziza for a third term and his victory in a fraudulent presidential election (escalating political violence), the failed coup d'état in May 2015, violations of human rights and the emergence of new armed groups. In 2020, the historic leader Pierre

Nkurunziza passed away, although the new leader, Domitien Ndayishimiye, had an approach towards the political and armed opposition similar to that of his predecessor.

**The Burundian security forces continued their operations in the Congolese border province of South Kivu in pursuit of Burundian insurgents during the year and were also active in the Congolese province of North Kivu as part of the EAC's regional mission (EAC-RF) deployed to stop the armed group M23.<sup>23</sup> Sporadic insurgent activity continued on the border between Burundi and Rwanda and rebel operations inside the country increased in the latter part of the year.** As such, counterinsurgency operations continued to be led by the Burundian Armed Forces and the Imbonerakure youth militias, the youth wing of the ruling party, the National Council for the Defence of Democracy-Forces for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD-FDD), in the Congolese province of South Kivu in pursuit of Burundian insurgents, especially the Tutsi armed group RED-Tabara, which has its bases in the DRC. In August 2022, Burundi had revealed the existence of a bilateral agreement between the DRC and Burundi that allowed the Burundian military to enter Congolese territory, though it had been reported that Burundian security forces were in the DRC to pursue the insurgents since late 2021.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, the armed group RED-Tabara, based in the DRC, carried out the first attacks in Burundi since 2021. The armed group has launched various attacks since September, including at the Bujumbura airport. In December, it battled with the Burundian Army in the province of Bubanza, killing three soldiers. On 22 December, it launched an attack on the city of Vugizo, near the Congolese border, killing 20, though both the government and RED-Tabara blamed each other for the incident. The government said that the attack claimed the lives of 19 civilians and a police officer, including 12 children, and that nine people were wounded. The RED-Tabara rebels claimed that nine soldiers and a police officer had been killed and that their attack targeted the Vugizo border post, so the civilian casualties had been caught in the crossfire with the Congolese security forces. These acts of violence also sparked new tensions with Rwanda after months of improving relations between the two countries. The Burundian armed group FNL, which is also active against Rwanda, carried out operations in Burundi near the Rwandan border that helped to raise tensions. In addition, the Burundian security forces carried out actions against Tutsi civilians in Cibitoke province in pursuit of RED-Tabara in their stronghold in the Kibira forest area in northwestern Burundi (bordering with Rwanda). In December, Burundian President Évariste Ndayishimiye accused Rwanda of financing and training RED-Tabara, which is of Tutsi origin and pro-Rwandan. Kigali denied the accusation and closed its borders with Burundi once again. The research centre ACLED counted 151 fatalities during 2023, fewer than in previous years

23. See the summary on the DRC (east) in this chapter.

24. See the summary on Burundi in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Alert 2023! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2023.

(245 in 2022 and 285 in 2021).<sup>25</sup> These data show a slight improvement compared to previous years, though they do not take insurgent and counterinsurgent activity in the DRC into account. According to UNHCR, at the end of 2023 there were 259,129 Burundian refugees, especially in the DRC, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. This was roughly the same amount as the previous year, when there were 259,279 refugees.<sup>26</sup>

**Meanwhile, the atmosphere of political violence continued with acts of repression, arbitrary arrests and forced disappearances of members of the political opposition** by the security forces and the Imbonerakure. Opposition leader Kefa Nibizi was arrested in October and there were acts of violence and repression against members of the CNL party, led by Agathon Rwasa, throughout the year. In April, former Prime Minister Guillaume Bunyoni was arrested on charges of plotting a coup d'état in 2022. His trial took place during the year and ended in December with a life sentence handed down by the Supreme Court. Human rights organisations had requested in vain that the investigation include the serious human rights violations committed by the security forces under his government between 2015 and 2020. In October, the UN Commission on Human Rights extended the mandate of the special rapporteur for Burundi for another year, citing the persistence of serious human rights violations in the country. The rapporteur's annual report described the gradual shrinking of public space and the growing pressure on political parties, civil society organisations and the media in view of the legislative and municipal elections of 2025. Moreover, members of the ruling party, the CNDD-FDD, said they supported eliminating ethnic quotas in the public sector as established by the 2018 Constitution and the Arusha Agreement of 2000. Doing so would legitimise the complete exclusion of the Tutsi minority, since members of the Hutu community currently occupy most positions in the public sector.

CAR	
<b>Start:</b>	2006
<b>Type:</b>	Government, Resources Internationalised internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Government of CAR, armed groups that are members of the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC, made up of anti-balaka factions led by Mokom and Ngaïssona, 3R, FPRC, MPC and UPC), opposition armed coalition Siriri, ethnic militia AAKG, other local and foreign armed groups, France, MINUSCA, Rwanda, Russia, Wagner Group
<b>Intensity:</b>	2
<b>Trend:</b>	=

25. ACLED, [Dashboard](#) [Viewed on 10 January 2024].  
 26. UNHCR, [Operational Data Portal, Burundi](#), 31 January 2024.

**Summary:**  
 Since independence in 1960, the situation in the Central African Republic has been characterised by continued political instability, which has resulted in several coups and military dictatorships. The keys to the situation are of an internal and external nature. Internal, because there is a confrontation between political elites from northern and southern ethnic groups who are competing for power and minorities that have been excluded from it. A number of leaders have attempted to establish a system of patronage to ensure their political survival. And external, due to the role played by its neighbours Chad and Libya; due to its natural resources (diamonds, uranium, gold, hardwoods) and the awarding of mining contracts in which these countries compete alongside China and the former colonial power, France, which controls uranium. Conflicts in the region have led to the accumulation of weaponry and combatants who have turned the country into regional sanctuary. This situation has been compounded by a religious dimension due to the fact that the Séléka coalition, which is a Muslim faith organisation formed by a number of historically marginalised groups from the north and which counts foreign fighters amongst its ranks, took power in March 2013 after toppling the former leader, François Bozizé, who for the past 10 years had fought these insurgencies in the north. The inability of the Séléka leader, Michel Djotodia, to control the rebel coalition, which used violence to control the country and has committed gross violations of human rights, looting and extrajudicial executions, has led to the emergence of Christian militias ("anti-balaka"). These militias and sectors of the army, as well as supporters of former President Bozizé, have rebelled against the government and Séléka, creating a climate of chaos and widespread impunity. France, the AU and the UN intervened militarily to reduce the clashes and facilitate the process of dialogue that would lead to a negotiated transition, forcing a transitional government that led to the 2015-2016 elections. After a brief period of reduced instability and various peace agreements, armed groups continued to control most of the country. Neither the reduced Central African security forces (which barely controlled Bangui) nor MINUSCA were able to reverse the situation. New initiatives by the AU and ECCAS helped to reach the February 2019 peace agreement. However, some groups pulled out of the agreement in late 2020 and started a new rebellion, the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC). The government's inability to deal with the situation prompted it to request bilateral support from Rwanda and the Russian security company Wagner, which increased the complexity of the situation due to the proliferation of armed actors in the country.

**Fighting continued during the year, especially in the east, where government security forces were scarce and the Russian private security company Wagner was active** against the main armed groups affiliated with the rebel coalition known as the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC). The violence forcibly displaced thousands of people and serious human rights violations against civilians were reportedly perpetrated by all actors in the armed conflict. According to the UN, security problems persisted due to clashes between armed groups, the limited authority of the state in areas far from the capital and cross-border insecurity. The UN called for an inclusive dialogue ahead of the

local elections scheduled to be held in October 2024, but the government rejected the idea. According to the research centre ACLED, in 2023 there were 299 violent events (battles, violence against civilians and improvised explosive devices) that cost the lives of 581 people, significantly fewer than in 2022 (837) and 2021 (1,700), in the aftermath of the attempted coup d'état and rebel offensive that gained strong momentum in late 2020 and early 2021.<sup>27</sup> According to UNHCR data, at the end of 2023 more than 754,147 people were refugees in neighbouring countries and 511,803 were displaced inside the country. These figures are similar to those of 2022.<sup>28</sup>

Security conditions remained unstable throughout the country, especially in the east and in Haut Mbomou prefecture (south-east). The deployment of Central African security forces remained limited and a newly created ethnic militia, Azande Ani Kpi Gbe (AAKG), harassed Fulani and Muslim communities with threats, kidnappings of civilians and other activities due to its alleged collusion with Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC) insurgents. On 20 June, the AAKG was involved in a firefight with the UPC in Mboki that resulted in the deaths of 48 AAKG militiamen, four UPC fighters and five civilians. The crisis in Sudan caused security conditions to deteriorate in the border area, especially around Am Dafok, and this situation was compounded by the influx of refugees into the area. In the centre-east, in Haut-Kotto prefecture, violence intensified between the armed coalition CPC and the national security forces supported by Wagner. In the west, anti-balaka militias and the 3R group continued to attack civilians, limiting their freedom of movement and displacing them alongside counterinsurgency operations conducted by private security forces. Meanwhile, the indiscriminate use of ammunition and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) increased during the year, causing dozens of fatalities. Security conditions did improve in the capital, Bangui, and the national curfew was lifted on 7 July, after which the government increased the number of mobile checkpoints in the city to prevent criminal activities. In the north, the Siriri coalition, a political and armed group composed of several rebel militias, continued to carry out armed attacks from its bases in the prefectures of Vakaga and Bamingui-Bangoran. At the beginning of the year, the Siriri coalition announced plans to overthrow Touadéra's government.

The CAR remained a scenario of indirect geopolitical confrontation and of tension due to the presence of the international community through the UN mission in the country (MINUSCA), state security forces and private security companies. Wagner's rebellion in Russia<sup>29</sup> in

July caused the withdrawal of hundreds of mercenaries from the prefectures of Vakaga, Mambere-Kadei, Ouham Pende and Bangui, which forced the Central African Armed Forces (FACA) to abandon several military bases.<sup>30</sup> In light of President Touadéra's attempts to diversify his sources of support for security, in December it became public that there was a military cooperation agreement between the government and the US private security company Bancroft Global Development. Thus, early in the year, President Touadéra and Sudanese Vice President Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo reached an agreement for the paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces (RSF) to operate in Vakaga prefecture to combat armed groups and capture their leaders in exchange for the concession of mining rights. Later, following the outbreak of armed clashes in April between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the RSF in Sudan, French and US intelligence services revealed that the Wagner Group had been sending military matériel from the CAR to the RSF in Sudan.

The political situation was dominated by the constitutional referendum that was held on 30 July. The seventh republic was formally established in the Central African Republic when the new Constitution was promulgated on 30 August. The government declared that the constitutional changes reflected popular demand and would allow national development. The political opposition and various civil society organisations, religious associations and various groups have criticised the new Constitution, some of whose provisions continued to cause controversy, such as those relating to the requirements to run for election. Some armed groups and opposition groups, such as the armed coalition CPC, called on the country's population to boycott the referendum. The opposition civil coalition Republican Bloc for the Defence of the Constitution, some civil society organisations and several armed groups that did not sign the 2019 political agreement challenged the results. In his speech to the nation on 31 August, President Touadéra repeated his desire to carry out the peace process and the political transformation in the country, basing it on the new Constitution that had been promulgated the day before, and expressly invited the armed groups to rejoin the peace process. An observation mission from the regional organisation ECCAS noted that the conditions for the referendum had been satisfactory.

The new Constitution, which gives more power to the presidency and makes changes that could be interpreted as setbacks for independence between the powers of the state, extended the terms of office of the president and Parliament from five to seven years, eliminated the limitation of successive terms

27. Although the figures for fatalities in 2023 are lower than the figures for 2022, our analysis of the trend of the conflict and its impacts compared the previous year does not indicate any improvement in the situation or significant change in trend.

28. UNHCR, *Operational Data Portal - CAR Situation*. [Viewed on 31 January 2024].

29. See the summary on Russia in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises).

30. ACLED, *Moving Out of the Shadows. Shifts in Wagner Group Operations Around the World*, 3 August 2023.



and withdrew parliamentary control from the signing of mining contracts. This prerogative is now in the hands of the president. The Constitution also limited the Senate, which had been established by the 2015 Constitution but had never been created. It also established the creation of a chamber of traditional leaders, among other issues. Finally, given the wave of coups d'état in Central and West Africa and rumours of an imminent coup d'état in the CAR after the one carried out in neighbouring Gabon in late August, which ousted President Ali Bongo Ondimba, in early September the Presidential Guard arrested several military officers, revealing growing divisions within the FACA, according to the International Crisis Group (ICG).

DRC (east)	
<b>Start:</b>	1998
<b>Type:</b>	Government, Identity, Resources International
<b>Main parties:</b>	DRC, Burundi, Angola, MONUSCO, EAC Regional Force (Burundi, Kenya, Uganda and South Sudan), SAMIDRC (regional force of the SADC, composed of troops from South Africa, Malawi and Tanzania), pro-government militias Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (VDP, known as Wazalendo, composed of dozens of former Mai Mai militias and other armed groups from North Kivu and South Kivu, like APCLS, PARECO-FF, Nyatura, Raïa Mutomboki), FDLR, FDLR splinter groups (CNRD-Ubwiyunge, RUD-Urunana), private security companies (Agemira RDC and Congo Protection); March 23 Movement (M23), Twirwaneho, Rwanda; other armed groups not part of Wazalendo, Burundian armed groups; armed group of Ugandan origin LRA; Ituri groups and community militias (including, CODECO/URDPC, FPIC, FRPI, MAPI, Zaïre-FPAC)
<b>Intensity:</b>	3
<b>Trend:</b>	↑
<b>Summary:</b>	The current conflict has its origins in the coup d'état carried out by Laurent Desiré Kabila in 1996 against Mobutu Sese Seko, which culminated with him handing over power in 1997. Later, in 1998, Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda, together with various armed groups, tried to overthrow Kabila, who received the support of Angola, Chad, Namibia, Sudan and Zimbabwe, in a war that has caused around five million fatalities. The control and exploitation of the natural resources has contributed to the perpetuation of the conflict and to the presence of foreign armed forces.

The signing of a ceasefire in 1999, and of several peace agreements between 2002 and 2003, led to the withdrawal of foreign troops, the setting up of a transitional government and later an elected government, in 2006. However, did not mean the end of violence in this country, due to the role played by Rwanda and the presence of factions of non-demobilised groups and of the FDLR, responsible for the Rwandan genocide of 1994. The breach of the 2009 peace accords led to the 2012 desertion of soldiers of the former armed group CNDP, forming part of the Congolese army, who organised a new rebellion, known as the M23, supported by Rwanda. In December 2013 the said rebellion was defeated and part of its combatants took refuge in Rwanda and Uganda.. However, the M23 reorganised in 2022, causing an escalation of violence with the support of Rwanda, which worsened relations between the DRC and Rwanda.

**Although the conflict in the eastern part of the country became less intense during the year, starting in October the armed group March 23 Movement (M23) expanded its offensive in North Kivu. Combined with the activity of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)<sup>31</sup> and other groups in the provinces of Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu, the M23's escalation in the last quarter of the year contributed to a general atmosphere of insecurity.** The M23's offensive was directly linked to Rwanda's support, which the UN highlighted once again, gradually making it known throughout the international community. According to data collected by ACLED,<sup>32</sup> in 2023 there were 1,735 violent events (battles, violence against civilians and improvised explosive devices) in the country's five eastern provinces (Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu, Maniema and Tanganyika) that claimed 3,409 lives. In the country as a whole, violence linked to the different conflicts fell compared to 2022. ACLED counted 3,907 deaths in around 2,000 episodes of violence across the country in 2023, so the M23's strategic pause was reflected in the partial reduction in fatalities for the year as a whole.<sup>33</sup> In 2022, there had been 6,145 fatalities as a result of the violence everywhere in the country, a higher body count than in 2021, when over 2,300 episodes of violence had been reported, causing 4,723 deaths in those five provinces alone. According to the UN, violence by armed groups claimed over 1,100 civilians' lives just in the province of Ituri from January to October 2023. This happened in the middle of an election campaign, marked by a growing climate of political violence running up to the general elections in the DRC on 20 December, in which President Félix Tshisekedi was re-elected for a second term after winning more than 73% of the votes with a turnout of 43%. The elections were plagued by irregularities and allegations of fraud that could have influenced the entire process, according to various analysts.<sup>34</sup>

31. See the summary on the DRC (east-ADF) in this chapter.

32. ACLED, [Dashboard](#) [Viewed on 8 January 2024].

33. Although the death toll in 2023 is lower than it was in 2022, the analysis of the trend of the conflict compared to the previous year reflects a general worsening of the situation linked to the serious escalation of violence in the last part of the year and its different impacts.

34. See the DRC in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises).

Different diplomatic initiatives were launched to promote dialogue during the first quarter of the year (the efforts of Angola and Qatar<sup>35</sup> to reach a ceasefire failed) and the East African Community Regional Force (EAC-RF) was deployed in March. Composed of military personnel from Burundi, Kenya, Uganda and South Sudan, the EAC-RF lacked a mandate to use force. However, the M23 carried out a strategic withdrawal and reduced its activity as the EAC-RF completed its deployment, which culminated in April. In March, Angola also deployed 500 soldiers to North Kivu province to secure areas controlled by the M23. Between April and October, clashes between the government and the M23 group decreased, although the armed group continued to carry out sporadic attacks against local pro-government armed groups for control of territory in North Kivu. As a result of widespread violence, the illegal exploitation of natural resources increased, due diligence procedures collapsed in various mining sites recaptured by armed groups and smuggling to Rwanda grew again.

In its mid-term report, the UN Group of Experts corroborated Rwanda's interference in support of the M23 in the form of direct and active participation in hostilities against Congolese forces.<sup>36</sup> In December, the UN warned of the risk of a military confrontation between the DRC and Rwanda. The EU and the United States imposed sanctions on senior Rwandan and Congolese military officials and members of armed groups. The US also restricted military cooperation with Rwanda. In September, the M23 emerged from the low profile it had held for much of the year and announced on 18 September that it had taken over of the town of Kiwanja, which had nominally been under the control of the EAC-RF. In September, the mandate of the EAC-RF was extended by three months, although it played a token role on the ground. In October, the M23 resumed its offensive against the FARDC and the Wazalendo coalition of pro-government armed groups, launching armed attacks in different locations. The resumption of hostilities increased the hostile rhetoric between Kigali and Kinshasa, leading UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region Huang Xia to highlight the real risk of a direct conflict between Rwanda and the DRC due to both countries' mobilisation of troops, the absence of any direct high-level dialogue between them and the persistence of hate speech. During the Congolese election campaign, President Tshisekedi and other candidates used the conflict to mobilise the population in the eastern part of the country, promising to attack Rwanda if they won.

***Accusations of fraud in a climate of electoral political violence threatened to further destabilise the DRC while the war in the east raged in the background***

The fighting that resumed in October caused a catastrophic humanitarian situation and internally displaced more than one million people (reaching almost seven million internally displaced people (IDPs) in 2023), in addition to the one million existing refugees. This internal displacement figure (UNHCR had documented 5.76 million IDPs in 2022 and 5.6 million IDPs in 2021) led the IOM to state that the DRC was facing one of the world's worst humanitarian and displacement crises.

**The offensive also added to the general climate of violence of the election campaign.** During this period, there were different regional attempts to relaunch peace negotiations and international pressure on Rwanda increased, though the Luanda and Nairobi dialogue processes that began in 2022 remained at an impasse.<sup>37</sup> The United States tried to promote a ceasefire during the elections and had been facilitating contacts between the DRC and Rwanda since mid-November. A three-day truce came into force on 11 December<sup>38</sup> that applied to state and non-state actors in certain areas and routes in the eastern part of the country. Supported by the DRC and Rwanda, it was later extended for two weeks. Various sources indicated that the truce was monitored unevenly and that it was used by the M23 to reinforce its positions around Sake, with support from Rwanda. Criticised for its ineffectiveness throughout the year, the EAC-RF withdrew from the country at the request of the Congolese government, completing its departure on 21 December.

Burundian troops denied accusations that they had been fighting the Rwandan-backed armed group M23 in the DRC in support of the FARDC and Congolese militias, rather than respecting the mandate of the EAC-RF. The mandate of the EAC mission, made up of troops from Uganda, Kenya, Burundi and South Sudan, was to recapture positions previously occupied by M23 rebels after defeating FARDC soldiers and to establish a buffer zone to prevent further fighting between the M23 and the FARDC. On 11 December, the FARDC reported that all the soldiers of the Burundian contingent deployed in the eastern DRC as part of the EAC-RF had returned to Burundi after the force's mandate ended. The Congolese government decided not to renew its mandate because it had not fought the M23 and the civilian population had accused it of remaining passive in the face of the M23's activity. On the same day, the FARDC declined to comment on

35. Qarjouly, Asmahan, "Violence in DRC intensifies as Qatar takes steps to mediate", *Doha News*, 20 March 2023.

36. UN Security Council, *Final report of the Group of Experts, in accordance with paragraph 9 of resolution 2641 (2022)*, 13 June 2023.

37. See the summary on the DRC in chapter 2 (Peace negotiations in Africa) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

38. Reuters, "Exclusive: Eastern Congo ceasefire extended for two weeks, US official says", *Reuters*, 15 December 2023.



allegations that Burundian troops had been deployed to the DRC as part of a bilateral agreement between Kinshasa and Gitega, including several accounts of Burundian soldiers wearing FARDC uniforms and fighting M23 rebels backed by Rwanda. However, sources close to the FARDC, corroborated by multiple sources, reported that 1,070 Burundian Armed Forces personnel dressed in FARDC uniforms had been covertly deployed along the Sake-Kitchanga road since early October 2023 to secure Masisi territory against attacks by the M23 and Rwanda, together with the FARDC and Wazalendo. The deployment was carried out outside the framework of the EAC-RF. Meanwhile, since March the Congolese government and South Africa had been negotiating the deployment of a Southern African Development Community (SADC) force in the area to cooperate with the FARDC's combat operations against the M23. In May, the SADC approved the deployment of the SADC Mission in the DRC (SAMIDRC), which became effective on 15 December 2023.

Days before the elections, a new political and military coalition, Alliance Fleuve Congo, was created in Kenya.<sup>39</sup> Led by the former president of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), Corneille Nangaa, it allied with the armed group M23 and other groups from the eastern DRC. The intention of the new group, explained in a statement that Nangaa released from the M23's stronghold in Rutshuru (North Kivu), was to overthrow Tshisekedi's government. Kinshasa convened a meeting with the Kenyan ambassador to the DRC and recalled its ambassador to Kenya for consultations in protest, since Kenya was part of the EAC-RF and of regional mediation efforts. Moreover, the withdrawal of MONUSCO began in early 2024. Requested by the DRC, the withdrawal completed its first stage with the departure of 2,000 UN peacekeepers from the country. Demonstrations accusing MONUSCO of inaction and passivity before the escalation of violence prompted the intervention of the Congolese security forces. In August, Congolese security forces cracked down on an anti-MONUSCO protest staged by a religious group in Goma, killing 43 people, injuring 56 and arresting 150. This degree of repression sent a message to the entire country that the space for the freedom of expression and dissent was shrinking in the period prior to the general elections in late 2023, according to the ICG.

*The DRC faced one of the world's worst humanitarian and displacement crises, according to the IOM*

DRC (east - ADF)	
<b>Start:</b>	2014
<b>Type:</b>	System, Resources Internationalised internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Government of the DRC, government of Uganda, Mai-Mai militias, armed opposition group ADF, MONUSCO
<b>Intensity:</b>	3
<b>Trend:</b>	=

**Summary:**  
The Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (ADF-NALU) is an Islamist rebel group operating in the northwest of the Rwenzori massif (North Kivu, between DR Congo and Uganda) with between 1,200 and 1,500 Ugandan and Congolese militiamen recruited mainly in both countries as well as in Tanzania, Kenya and Burundi. It is the only group in the area considered a terrorist organisation and is included on the US list of terrorist groups. It was created in 1995 from the merger of other Ugandan armed groups taking refuge in DR Congo (Rwenzururu, ADF), later adopted the name ADF and follows the ideology of the former ADF, which originated in marginalised Islamist movements in Uganda linked to the conservative Islamist movement Salaf Tabliq. In its early years it was used by Zaire under Mobutu (and later by DR Congo under Kabila) to pressure Uganda, but it also received backing from Kenya and Sudan and strong underground support in Uganda. At first it wanted to establish an Islamic state in Uganda, but in the 2000s it entrenched in the communities that welcomed it in DR Congo and became a local threat to the administration and the Congolese population, though its activity was limited. In early 2013 the group began a wave of recruitment and kidnappings and an escalation of attacks against the civilian population. Since the start of the offensive by the Congolese Armed Forces in the region in 2019, there has been an escalation of violence with serious consequences for the civilian population.

As the second year has passed since the start of Operation Shujaa,<sup>40</sup> the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) continued their joint military operations with the

**Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) against the Allied Defence Forces (ADF),** primarily in Beni, North Kivu and southern Ituri. Multiple sources, including former ADF combatants and former ADF abductees, reported an increase in the pace of ADF operations starting in late 2022, particularly in Beni.

According to the UN Group of Experts' report of December 2023,<sup>41</sup> the ADF continued to put up resistance, despite the intensification and geographic expansion of Operation Shujaa, which affected it. The UPDF had reportedly killed over 550 ADF fighters since the beginning of the operation and claimed that it would soon wipe the group out. According to the UPDF and Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, senior ADF

39. Africanews, "DRC: Corneille Nangaa joins forces with M23 to create political platform", *Africanews*, 15 December 2023.  
40. Operation Shujaa was a military offensive launched by the Ugandan Armed Forces (UPDF) on Congolese soil against the armed group Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in retaliation for the explosions in Kampala on 16 November 2021 for which the ADF claimed responsibility.  
41. UN Security Council, *Letter dated 15 December 2023 from the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo addressed to the President of the Security Council*, S/2023/990, 30 December 2023.

leaders such as Mulalo and Meddie Nkalubo had been killed. However, the UN Group of Experts was unable to confirm these deaths. The ADF continued to move westwards to evade military pressure, adapting its tactics, operating in small mobile groups and carrying out sporadic attacks, especially in remote areas, along roads (particularly the Beni-Komanda-Mambasa national motorway) and in agricultural fields, taking advantage of the absence of state authority. According to the UN Group of Experts, the ADF's leaders decided to reduce attacks in the DRC, especially to gain the sympathy and support of the population, and to focus on attacks in Uganda. This led to intermittent pauses in ADF attacks in Ituri and particularly in Beni starting in July 2023.

**Since December 2022, ADF fighters have periodically infiltrated Uganda, carrying out at least five deadly attacks, including one on a school in Mpondwe in June 2023 that claimed the lives of 37 students and seven civilians,** making it the worst attack in Uganda since the Kasese massacre in November 2016, which killed 100 people. This marked an important turning point, since for over a decade ADF attacks had been concentrated mainly in the DRC. These recent attacks in Uganda were also operationally distinct from the targeted killings, improvised explosive device attacks and attempted attacks carried out on Ugandan soil in recent years and attributed to the ADF. All five attacks were carried out by ADF fighters operating in the DRC who had crossed the border into Uganda, unlike other attacks in which the ADF mobilised collaborators in Uganda to carry out killings or plant improvised explosive devices in the DRC. The recent ADF attacks in Uganda had a twofold objective: to retaliate for UDFP and FARDC operations and to shift the focus of those operations away from ADF areas in the DRC. The attacks were also allegedly intended to demonstrate that the ADF could still carry out large-scale, high-profile attacks and thereby embarrass the government of Uganda.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, according to several different sources collected by the UN Group of Experts, internal tensions have risen within the ADF, especially between the central leaders and the ADF commanders stationed in Mwalika (North Kivu). The tensions also reflected some lines of division between ADF leaders from Uganda, especially historical commanders, and non-Ugandan leaders like Bonge la Chuma and some of the more radical ADF leaders who had joined the group more recently. For example, according to internal ADF sources, the Mpondwe attack in Uganda had been planned by ADF Commander Abwakasi without having received instructions or approval from ADF General Musa Baluku. Instead of using ideology to recruit fighters,

the ADF motivated its new collaborators mainly in the DRC and mostly with money and by encouraging them to co-opt new collaborators in turn, which allowed them to constantly renew their networks. They continued their recruitment campaign in the DRC and abroad and engaged in the systematic exploitation of kidnapped girls and women as sex slaves under commander supervision. In its June report,<sup>43</sup> the Group of Experts indicated that according to recent information, **ADF combatants had launched exploratory missions to new areas to expand their operations to the provinces of Kinshasa, Tshopo, Haut-Uélé and South Kivu.**

DRC (west)	
<b>Start:</b>	2023
<b>Type:</b>	Identity, Resources, Territory Internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	DRC, Teke community militias, Yaka and Suku community militias (including the armed group Mobondo) and other allied community militias
<b>Intensity:</b>	2
<b>Trend:</b>	↑

**Síntesis:**

The origin of the conflict in the province of Mai-Ndombe (west) dates back to mid-2022 from a disagreement over a traditional tax (as part of customary law) on agricultural products established by the “native”<sup>44</sup> Teke community (considered the traditional landowners) who settled in the area before the “non-native” communities, mostly Yaka, but also Suku, Mbala and Songe (originally from the provinces of Kwango and Kwilu). These communities came to work as farmers on the Bateke plateau more than five decades ago. The farmers who arrived leased the land from the Teke chiefs in exchange for payment of this customary tax. Until recently, the communities lived together normally and bonds had been created between them. According to local sources collected by the UN, the first disagreements arose in 2021 and intensified in early 2022, when “non-native” communities refused to pay the increased tax. The Teke attempted to collect the tax by force, with the support of some local members of the Congolese National Police (PNC) and members of the FARDC, and Teke chiefs began telling farmers who did not want to pay to abandon their lands. In mid-2022, the first inter-community clashes broke out, which increased throughout 2023. The tax payment issue was soon transformed into one of land control and farmers, mainly from the Yaka community, began to claim the lands owned by the Teke. Another complaint from the Yaka farmers was that the Teke landowners had been selling the land to investors, even though it already belonged to the Yaka.<sup>45</sup> The Teke attacks against what they considered “non-native” communities provoked violent reprisals by the Yaka, who began to organise the armed group Mobondo, which was joined by members of other allied communities. During 2023, Mobondo raised its level of organisation, increased its military capabilities and carried out armed attacks.

42. See the summary on Uganda in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises).  
 43. UN Security Council, *Final report of the Group of Experts, in accordance with paragraph 9 of resolution 2641 (2022)*, S/2023/431, 13 June 2023.  
 44. The terms “natives” and “non-natives” are used in the same way as the UN Group of Experts in its last two reports on the subject, S/2023/431 of 13 June 2023 and especially to Annex 2 of the report S/2023/990, 30 December 2023.  
 45. See Annex 2 of the report of the UN Group of Experts. UN Security Council, *Letter dated 15 December 2023 from the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo addressed to the President of the Security Council*, S/2023/990, 30 December 2023.

**The outbreak of violence in mid-2022 in the territory of Kwamouth, in the western province of Mai-Ndombe, which pitted members of the Teke and Yaka communities against each other, intensified in 2023. Considered an armed conflict, it spread to the neighbouring provinces of Kwango, Kwilu, Kinshasa and Kongo Central, causing hundreds of fatalities.** The violence threatened to surround Kinshasa, the capital, where members of the Teke and Yaka communities live, and displaced thousands of civilians. The emergence of Mobondo, an armed group of predominantly Yaka fighters, hampered reconciliation efforts. Both communities remained armed and mobilised. The violence had started on 9 June 2022 in Masia-Mbe village, in the Bateke Sud sector of Mai-Ndombe, where a Yaka farmer was injured while taxes were being collected on behalf of the traditional Teke chief. Yaka farmers began inciting others to refuse to pay taxes. Several sources reported that members of the Yaka community and other “non-native” farmers began organising meetings and inciting members of their community to claim that in the past, Kwamouth, in Mai-Ndombe province, used to belong to the Yaka. Economic interests, such as access to land and property, and political interests, such as the re-establishment of customary power, significantly influenced the continuation of the conflict. The increase in Mobondo’s attacks against the FARDC in 2023 led the military authorities to label the conflict an “insurrection”. The deadly attacks by the Teke and Yaka massively displaced the population, which worsened the serious humanitarian crisis. Since the beginning of the conflict, entire villages have been burned down and militias formed by members of both the Teke and Yaka communities have established checkpoints to search for members of other communities they consider hostile. Hundreds of schools and medical centres have been destroyed or forced to close. Serious human rights violations have been reported, including sexual violence, kidnappings for ransom and torture.

Hundreds of civilians have perished as a result of the conflict. According to ACLED, there were 346 fatalities in a total of 94 violent events (battles, violence against civilians and improvised explosive devices) in 2023, though the real figures are likely to be much higher, according to the UN Group of Experts,<sup>46</sup> since violence and crime were underreported and responsibility was difficult to assign due to the lack of access to conflict areas. The attacks of the Teke against what they considered “non-native” communities provoked violent reprisals by the Yaka, who began to organise the armed group Mobondo, which was joined by members of other allied communities, such as the Suku, Mbala, Ndinga, Songe and Ngongo. Throughout 2023, Mobondo increased its level of organisation, enhanced its military capabilities and carried out military-type attacks, according to the UN Group of Experts. However, it is still

unclear whether Mobondo is a hierarchically structured homogeneous group or a coalition of like-minded groups without a central command. In 2023, FARDC operations led to the disarmament and arrest of hundreds of Mobondo fighters. Although some were imprisoned and put on trial, many were transferred to FARDC training centres. In addition, Fabrice “Mini Kongo” Zombi, appointed by the president of the DRC as the chief negotiator between the Yaka and Teke communities, mobilised hundreds of Mobondo members to join FARDC training camps. “Mini Kongo” is a traditional Suku chief recognised as a ceremonial figure by the Yaka. As such, the Teke accused him of collaborating with Mobondo. According to the Group of Experts, more than 1,000 fighters from Mai-Ndombe and elsewhere, including Mobondo fighters who had surrendered, were recruited, trained and deployed to North Kivu, in the eastern DRC, to fight the M23 without these earlier events having been investigated.

South Sudan	
<b>Start:</b>	2009
<b>Type:</b>	Government, Resources, Identity Internationalised internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Government (SPLM/A), SPLM/A-in Opposition armed group (faction of former vice president, Riek Machar), Kitgwang dissident factions of the SPLA-IO led by Peter Gatdet, Simon Gatwech Dual and Johnson Olony (also known as “Agwalek”), SPLM- FD, SSLA, SSDM/A, SSDM-CF, SSNLM, REMNASA, NAS, SSUF (Paul Malong), communal militias (SSPPF, TFN, White Army, Shilluk Agwelek), Sudan Revolutionary Front armed coalition (SRF, composed of JEM, SLA-AW, SLA-MM and SPLM-N), Non- Signatory South Sudan Opposition Groups (NSSSOG), previously the South Sudan Opposition Movements Alliance (SSOMA, composed of NAS, SSUF/A, Real-SPLM, NDM-PF, UDRM/A, NDM-PF, SSNMC), Sudan, Uganda, UNMISS
<b>Intensity:</b>	3
<b>Trend:</b>	↓
<b>Summary:</b>	The peace agreement reached in 2005, which put an end to the Sudanese conflict, recognised the right to self-determination of the south through a referendum. However, the end of the war with the North and the later independence for South Sudan in 2011 did not manage to offer stability to the southern region. The disputes for the control of the territory, livestock and political power increased between the multiple communities that inhabit South Sudan, increasing the number, the gravity and the intensity of the confrontations between them. The situation became even worse after the general elections in April

46. UN Security Council, *Letter dated 15 December 2023 from the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo addressed to the President of the Security Council*, S/2023/990, 30 December 2023.

2010, when several military officials who had presented their candidature or had supported political opponents to the incumbent party, the SPLM, did not win the elections. These military officers refused to recognise the results of the elections and decided to take up arms to vindicate their access to the institutions, condemn the Dinka dominance over the institutions and the under representation of other communities within them while branding the South Sudan government as corrupt. Juba's offerings of amnesty did not manage to put an end to insurgence groups, accused of receiving funding and logistical support from Sudan. In parallel, there was an escalation of violence in late 2013 between supporters of the government of Salva Kiir and those of former Vice President Riek Machar (SPLA-IO), unleashing a new round of violence that continues to this day. In 2015, a peace agreement was signed between the government and the SPLA-IO, which was ratified in 2018. However, the signatory parties' reluctance to implement it, as well as the emergence of other armed groups and community militias, have kept the war raging in the country.

**The dynamics of instability and violence continued in the country during the year, owing primarily to intercommunity clashes, splits within the SPLA-IO and the contagious effect of the war in neighbouring Sudan.** According to data provided by ACLED, in 2023 there were 464 violent events (battles, violence against civilians and improvised explosive devices) that costs the lives of 1,262 people. These data show a de-escalation of violence compared to the previous year, when 597 episodes of violence and 1,898 associated deaths were reported.<sup>47</sup> Despite this relative drop in fatalities, the problems linked to the humanitarian crisis and forced displacement in the country persisted. According to UNHCR data, 2.2 million people were refugees due to violence in mid-2023 and 1,490,100 were internally displaced.<sup>48</sup> These figures continue to rank South Sudan as having the fourth-most disregarded displacement crisis in the world, according to OCHA. OCHA also asserted that the forced displacement crisis has worsened because South Sudan has taken in more than half a million refugees from Sudan, in addition to all the South Sudanese refugees who have returned to the country due to the insecurity caused by the start of the armed conflict in Sudan in April 2023. Due to the persistent humanitarian crisis in the country, OCHA continued to predict that 9 million people (out of a population of 12.4 million) would require humanitarian assistance and protection in 2024, warning of high levels of violence, exploitation and abuse, including sexual and gender violence.<sup>49</sup>

**Violence in the country was once again characterised by intercommunity clashes, as well as disputes between the SPLA-IO and different splinter factions. The intercommunity violence continued throughout**

the year, affecting various states with clashes between members of different groups: Lou Nuer and Bor Dinka (Jonglei), Nuer and Twic Dinka (Abyei), Twic Dinka (Warrap) and Ngok Dinka (Abyei), Murle (Jonglei), Kuku and Bor Dinka (Central Equatoria), Luacjang and Pakam (Warrap) and Nuer and Shilluk (Malakal). Armed clashes also took place between ethnic Shilluk forces known as "Agwalek" under the command of General Johnson Olony against Nuer forces backed by General Simon Gatwech. These clashes had begun on 9 August 2022 after General Gatwech, the leader of the Kitgwang faction that split from the SPLA-IO that same year, dismissed General Olony as his second-in-command, motivating the formation of a new Kitgwang faction. Thus, the SPLA-IO continued to suffer from major internal divisions that weakened it. On 7 June, South Sudanese President Salva Kiir and Johnson Olony agreed to officially integrate "Agwalek" fighters into the South Sudanese Armed Forces. Later, in October, two other important men defected from the SPLA-IO to support the government faction led by Kiir: Simon Maguek Gai, the commander of Unity State, and Michael Wal Nyak, the commander of Jonglei State. Taken together, these defections drastically reduced the SPLA-IO's military capacity in both states. Tensions between Machar's forces and Gai's forces led to fighting in Unity State throughout the rest of the year, resulting in the SPLA-IO losing all its military positions except Panyijiar County, its last stronghold in Unity State.

**Meanwhile, the outbreak of war in neighbouring Sudan between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) on 15 April had significant effects in South Sudan.**<sup>50</sup> It threatened South Sudanese oil exports, which account for 85% of

*The dynamics of intercommunity violence in South Sudan continued, affecting multiple regions of the country*

the South Sudanese government's revenue. In mid-June, the RSF threatened to blow up the pipeline connecting South Sudan to Sudan, which would prevent the export of South Sudanese oil through Port Sudan and have catastrophic economic consequences. The Sudanese conflict reduced food supplies along the border between the two countries, causing food shortages and high prices in northern South Sudan. In response to the Sudanese crisis, President Kiir led the efforts of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to mediate between the conflicting parties. On 15 March, the UN Security Council renewed the mandate of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) for one year, placing greater emphasis on protecting civilians, and on 26 May it extended sanctions on South Sudan, including the arms embargo.

Finally, some progress was reported during the year in the **implementation of the Revitalised Agreement**

47. ACLED, [Dashboard](#) [Viewed on 26 February 2024].

48. UNHCR, [Mid-Year Trends 2023](#), 25 October 2023.

49. OCHA, [South Sudan](#) [Viewed on 26 February 2024].

50. See the summary on Sudan in this chapter.



on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan of 2018 (R-ARCSS) and plans were confirmed to hold the presidential election in December 2024. The **peace talks in Rome** between the South Sudanese government and groups that had not signed the R-ARCSS, represented under the coalition of the Non-Signatory South Sudan Opposition Groups (NSSSOG), were formally reactivated in February after getting cancelled in late 2022. Nevertheless, no significant progress was made in the talks for the rest of the year, though Kenya did report its intention to host them in 2024.<sup>51</sup>

Sudan <sup>52</sup>	
<b>Start:</b>	2023
<b>Type:</b>	Government, Self-government, Resources, Identity Internationalised internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Government (Sudan Armed Forces), Rapid Support Forces (RSF), armed coalition Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF, composed of JEM, SLA-AW, SLA-MM and SPLM-N), several SLA factions, Eastern Sudan Liberation Forces, United Popular Front for Liberation and Justice, Beja National Congress, Beja Armed Congress, community militias, Wagner Group
<b>Intensity:</b>	3
<b>Trend:</b>	↑

**Síntesis:**  
After 30 years in power, Omar al-Bashir's regime fell in April 2019 after massive popular demonstrations that security forces used to carry out a coup d'état. After months of administration by the military junta and significant national tensions, a transitional civilian-military government was formed in late 2019. However, on 25 October 2021, a new military coup carried out by the military wing of the transitional government ended the political transition. It was followed by a period of widespread public protests against the military junta (Transitional Sovereignty Council) chaired by the head of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and deputy-chaired by the leader of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), Lieutenant General Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, popularly known as "Hemedti". In late 2022, after a year of negotiations, a framework agreement was reached in which the military promised to relinquish much of its political power and return it to civilian actors. However, disagreements between the SAF and RSF during the negotiations over security sector reform, especially regarding deadlines for integrating the RSF into the unified national Sudanese Armed Forces and the establishment of the security structure command, ended up unleashing a new armed conflict in the country on 15 April 2023. This new

outbreak of violence was initially concentrated in the capital, Khartoum, but over the months that followed it intensified and expanded over much of the country, affecting the dynamics of the pre-existing armed conflict in the regions of Darfur and the Two Areas South Kordofan and Blue Nile) and reaching eastern Sudan. In the Darfur region, the armed conflict dates back to 2003 and is rooted in demands made by various insurgent groups, primarily the SLA and JEM, for greater decentralisation and development of the region. The Sudanese government responded to the armed uprising in Darfur using the Sudanese Armed Forces and Arab Janjaweed militias. The reconfiguration of the state of Sudan following the secession of South Sudan in July 2011 aggravated tensions between the Sudanese government and both border regions (South Kordofan and Blue Nile), which had supported the southern SPLA insurgency during the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005). After the secession of South Sudan, the SPLA-North was formed in the Two Areas, beginning an armed conflict based on the insurgents' demand for recognition of ethnic and political plurality.

**In April, a new armed conflict broke out in the country between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).**

Tensions rose during the first quarter of the year between the country's military leaders, the chair of the Transitional Sovereignty Council (TSC) and head of the SAF, Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the deputy chair of the TSC and leader of the RSF, Lieutenant General Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, popularly known as "Hemedti", due to their disagreements during the negotiations over security sector reform, especially regarding deadlines for integrating the RSF into the unified national Sudanese Armed Forces and the establishment of the command structure.<sup>53</sup> Tensions rose in early April with the spread of rumours about the mobilisation of military personnel from both sides in Khartoum and Darfur. Finally, after several different actors failed in their attempts to mediate, the tensions led to armed clashes on 15 April between the SAF led by al-Burhan and the RSF commanded by Dagalo. Although initially the fighting was concentrated in the capital, Khartoum, killing hundreds of people in the first few days, it intensified over the course of the year and spread over almost the entire country, particularly in all five federal states of Darfur (North Darfur, Central Darfur, West Darfur, East Darfur and South Darfur), North and South Kordofan, Kassala, Gedarif, Red Sea and Blue Nile.<sup>54</sup> At first the SAF seized control of several cities, including Kassala and Port Sudan in the east, while the RSF had the advantage in Darfur and fighting intensified for control of Khartoum. During the year, the armed conflict was characterised by SAF attacks on cities with heavy

51. See the summary on South Sudan in chapter 2 (Peace negotiations in Africa) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

52. In previous years, two distinct armed conflicts were identified in Sudan: Sudan (Darfur), which began in 2003, and Sudan (South Kordofan and Blue Nile), which started in 2012. Both conflicts, characterised as internationalised internal and motivated by self-government, resources and identity, were analysed jointly in this edition as part of the Sudanese armed conflict. This is because the dynamics of the armed conflict that began in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) affect a large part of the country and particularly the regions of Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile. Irregular armed actors from these regions are also actively involved in the conflict.

53. See the summary on Sudan in chapter 2 (Peace negotiations in Africa) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

54. Report of the Secretary-General, *Situation in the Sudan and the activities of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan*, S/2023/355, 16 May 2023

artillery and air strikes, while the RSF used guerrilla warfare techniques and surface-to-air missiles, as it lacked planes.

The beginning of the fighting gave rise to different mediation efforts that failed to contain the violence, despite the signing of different ceasefires (24 and 27-30 April; 4-11 and 22-31 May; 20 and 26-27 June, among others) and humanitarian truces, which were systematically violated by the parties. As the negotiations foundered, the fighting between the SAF and the RSF intensified and involved other armed groups, affecting regions that were already mired in dynamics of armed conflict, such as South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Darfur. Although several armed groups that had signed the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement declared their opposition to the war and their neutrality when the fighting first broke out between the SAF and RSF, including the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) Malik Agar faction and the Sudan Liberation Army Minni Minawi faction (SLA-MM), over time they took part in the hostilities.

**The outbreak of fighting between the SAF and RSF plunged the Darfur region into the worst crisis since the end of the Second Sudanese Civil War.** The year had already begun with fresh attacks against civilians and the proliferation of armed militias in Darfur, which caused the armed group Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) to announce the formation of a joint force with the RSF to put an end to the insecurity, excluding the Sudanese Armed Forces and other armed groups, but including the coalition of armed groups in West Darfur known as the Sudanese Alliance. These events also provoked the closure of the land border with the CAR, which remained shut until 9 March. In May, with fighting between the SAF and RSF intensifying in Darfur, tensions between communities worsened, especially between Rizeigat Arab groups (where most RSF personnel come from) and Masalit groups, which are not Arabs. This rise in violence prompted the governor of Darfur and leader of the SLA-MM, Minni Minnawi, to tell the inhabitants of Darfur to arm themselves on 28 May, increasing the risk of civil war. On 14 June, the governor of West Darfur was assassinated after he accused the RSF of genocide. During the following months, the RSF took control of large areas of Central, South, East and West Darfur, concentrating its offensive on South Darfur, which was captured in October after the conquest of its capital, Nyala, and on North Darfur. In November, after the RSF advanced towards El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur, different Darfuri armed groups that had signed the Juba

*The armed conflict that began between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces on 15 April forcibly displaced over 7.5 million people and claimed over 13,000 lives after eight months of fighting*

Peace Agreement, whose members largely come from the Zaghawa community, renounced their neutrality and joined the SAF. This could have important repercussions for Chad, whose government and military are dominated by members of the Zaghawa community. Furthermore, the faction that did not sign the Juba Peace Agreement, the Sudan Liberation Army Abdul Wahid al-Nur wing (SLA-AW), arrived in El Fasher on 24 November primarily to protect the displaced persons camps in the city.

The deteriorating security situation in **South Kordofan and Blue Nile** prompted the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) to mobilise on 8 June. Some reports accused the SPLM-N and RSF of attacking SAF positions in the al-Dalanj region. From then until the end of the year, the rebel group continued to expand its presence in the war in the states of South Kordofan and Blue Nile, emerging as the third force in the conflict.

In the **eastern part of the country**, in the states of Red Sea, Kassala and Gedarif, fighting was also reported throughout the year, giving rise to the emergence or rearmament of different regional armed groups, such as the Eastern Sudan Liberation Forces, led by Ibrahim Dunya, the United Popular Front for Liberation and Justice, headed by El Amin Daoud, the Beja National Congress, commanded by Mousa Mohamed Ahmed, and the Beja Armed Congress, led by Omar Taher.<sup>55</sup>

In late August, the head of the SAF, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, escaped from the general headquarters in Khartoum after the RSF had been besieging the city for months. Fighting continued in Khartoum and the neighbouring city of Omdurman for the rest of the year, while also intensifying in the east and other parts of the south of the country. Due to the security crisis, in early December the UN Security Council decided to end the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) and close down its operations, which it planned to end on 29 February 2024.

Finally, **in relation to the impact of the war, the data on the intensity and lethality of the conflict during the year collected by ACLED show more than 13,000 deaths in the country** due to violent episodes since the fighting first broke out in April. These were concentrated in the capital and the states of Darfur.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, over 7.5 million people were forcibly displaced from their homes, of which 1.3 million were refugees and more than 6 million were internally displaced civilians, according to UNHCR data.<sup>57</sup> The UN warned that the number of people

55. Radio Dabanga, "Eritrea military training camps raise concerns about security in eastern Sudan", *Radio Dabanga*, 26 January 2024.

56. ACLED, *Sudan: The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) Gains Ground in Sudan, Situation Update. December 2023, 12 January 2024* [Viewed on 15 January 2024].

57. ACNUR, "Sudan Situation", *Operational Data Portal* [Viewed on 15 January 2024].



needing humanitarian assistance in the country, which had already reached a record high before the clashes, equivalent to one third of the population, soared during the year to 25 million people, adding that the magnitude of the crisis could destabilise the entire region.

There were also many complaints of **human rights violations and war crimes** during the conflict. In West Darfur, the epicentre of the conflict between Rizeigat Arab and non-Arab Masalit communities, the UN reported in mid-July that the bodies of at least 87 Masalit people had been discovered in mass graves. The International Criminal Court reported the formal opening of an investigation into alleged **war crimes in Darfur**. Amnesty International also documented widespread war crimes committed by both sides in the conflict.<sup>58</sup> These events led to the adoption of Resolution A/HRC/RES/54/2 by the UN Human Rights Council on 11 October, which provided for an independent international fact-finding mission for Sudan, with a mandate to investigate and establish the facts, circumstances and root causes of all alleged human rights violations and abuses, as well as violations of international humanitarian law in the context of the armed conflict.

## Horn of Africa

Ethiopia (Amhara)	
<b>Start:</b>	2023
<b>Type:</b>	Government, Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Government of Ethiopia, regional government of Amhara, Amhara Fano militia
<b>Intensity:</b>	3
<b>Trend:</b>	↑

### Summary:

During the demonstrations between 2015 and 2018 that brought Abiy Ahmed, a member of the Oromo community, to power, there was a resurgence of nationalism among the Amhara, an ethnic group that has felt marginalised during this stage of the country's transformation and lives mostly in the Amhara region, though it can also be found in other parts of the country. The escalation of violence and repression in 2023 dates back to the peace agreement signed in 2022 by the federal government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) to end the war (2020-2022). The agreement raised concerns among the Amhara community, which had been excluded from the talks even though the nationalist Fano militias and the Amhara special forces (a paramilitary group linked to the regional government) fought on the side of the Ethiopian Army, as did Eritrea, which was also shut out of the agreement. All the actors involved committed crimes against humanity against the population of the Tigray community during the conflict in Tigray. Perceptions of betrayal spread throughout the Amhara region, especially after Abiy announced plans to dismantle the special forces in each of Ethiopia's 11 ethnic regions. The

prime minister proposed integrating the tens of thousands of special forces combatants into the Ethiopian Army and police to promote interethnic unity and prevent regional forces from being used as political tools and from getting drawn into conflicts, as was the case in Tigray. However, many Amhara regarded his plan with alarm, arguing that it would leave them vulnerable to attacks from neighbouring Tigray, their historical rivals in Ethiopia, as well as from the Oromo community, Ethiopia's largest ethnic group, followed by the Amhara. The Oromo armed group OLA has also been accused of committing widespread atrocities against Amhara people in Oromia, raising fears that it wants to drive them out of the region. Although some Amhara special force soldiers did agree to join the Ethiopian Army and police, many deserted and joined the Fano militias. Furthermore, this Amhara nationalist movement took advantage of the war in the Tigray region, using these paramilitary militias to regain and occupy two historically disputed territories that are part of Tigray (Western and Southern Tigray, called Welkait-Tsegede and Raya by Amhara nationalists, respectively), where a provisional Amhara administration was established that the federal government of Ethiopia banned after the conflict ended.

**Instability in the Amhara region worsened starting on 6 April, when the federal government of Ethiopia announced the disarmament, dissolution and integration of the Amhara special forces and Fano militias into the Ethiopian Army and police. Since then, there has been an escalation of violence, repression and clashes between the federal security forces and these militias, which were joined by part of the regional security forces that deserted their posts.** The announcement in April sparked widespread protests across the region for it was seen as threatening amid concerns that Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's alliance with Oromo nationalists and closer ties with Tigray following the peace deal in November 2022 was isolating the Amhara region. Some special forces refused to comply with the order and instead allied with the Fano militias, clashing with federal soldiers in several areas.<sup>59</sup> Demonstrations also broke out across the region, with protesters blocking roads, burning tyres and chanting slogans against Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and the ruling Prosperity Party and its regional branch. On 9 April, Abiy Ahmed vowed to press ahead with the plan as the government deployed troops, imposed a curfew and cut internet services in parts of Amhara. Dozens of people died in the unrest, which began to subside in mid-April.

However, on 27 April, unidentified gunmen killed Girma Yeshitila, the head of the Amhara branch of the Prosperity Party, and his bodyguard in the northern Shewa area. Addis Abeba responded with a harsh crackdown during which federal security forces were accused of committing serious forms of abuse that led to a gradual rise in violence and the beginning of a rebellion when other Amhara nationalist movements joined against the regional government and the federal government. This low-intensity conflict intensified

58. Amnesty International, *Death Came To Our Home": War Crimes and Civilian Suffering In Sudan*, August 2023.

59. Reuters, "Amhara Gunfire Over Military Merger", *VOA Africa*, 10 April 2023.

in August, with the Fano militias taking control of several towns and repression by federal and regional forces. In early August, the federal government blocked Internet access in the region and declared a six-month state of emergency.<sup>60</sup> In the weeks that followed, the government launched an offensive to regain control of the occupied towns, expelling the Fano militias from the cities. There was also a wave of hundreds of arrests of suspects accused of having links to the militants, including politicians, such as the anti-government critic Christian Tadelle. The clashes and the death count worsened in September, as did reports of extrajudicial killings by both sides. Near the end of the year, federal security forces stepped up air operations with combat aircraft and drones against the Fano militias' bases. Many civilians were killed in these bombings. In August, ACLED reported that large parts of Amhara essentially experienced an institutional power vacuum, given the widespread rejection of the ruling party officials running the region, aligned with Abiy Ahmed. According to ACLED's data,<sup>61</sup> in 2023 there were 566 violent events (battles, violence against civilians and improvised explosive devices) in the Amhara region that claimed 1,718 lives. This figure combines violence directly linked to the armed conflict, crackdowns on protests against government action and the ethnic cleansing of civilians.

In September, the AU International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), which has a UN mandate, published a report detailing serious human rights violations committed in the different conflicts in Ethiopia. The report also covered how ongoing rights violations and abuse had become increasingly widespread in the country, particularly in the Oromia and Amhara regions, and noted that hostilities in Ethiopia had escalated to a "national scale". The ICHREE has not been granted access to Ethiopia since its initial visit in 2022. Following this report and given the denial of access, the UN Human Rights Council decided to suspend its mandate in October, meaning that there is no longer any independent mechanism investigating atrocities in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia (Oromia)	
<b>Start:</b>	2022
<b>Type:</b>	Self-Government, Identity, Resources Internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Government of Ethiopia, regional government of Oromia, armed group Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), Amhara Fano militias
<b>Intensity:</b>	3
<b>Trend:</b>	=
<b>Summary:</b>	
Ethiopia has been the scene of secessionist movements since the 1970s. Between 1973 and 1974, a political and	

military movement called the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) arose in the central and southern Oromia region against the Mengistu dictatorship to establish an independent state for the Oromo community. Despite their differences, Oromo nationalist political and armed movements participated alongside other insurgent groups in the country to overthrow the Mengistu regime in 1991. However, in 1992 the OLF distanced itself from the EPRDF coalition government and launched a rebellion against this and other Oromo nationalist movements, demanding independence for the region. In the meantime, Oromia has experienced a cycle of protests initiated by the student movement in 2014 against the Ethiopian regime due to claims linked to its perceived marginalisation of the Oromo people. These protests provoked a harsh government crackdown that caused thousands of fatalities. The protests led in part to the resignation of Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn in 2018 and the appointment of Abiy Ahmed, a member of the Oromo community, who undertook a series of political reforms aimed at fostering national unity and reconciliation. Abiy Ahmed reached a peace agreement with the OLF and other political and military groups, facilitating their return from exile. Though Oromo nationalists assumed that the coming to power of Abiy Ahmed, a member of their community, would boost the region's autonomy, Abiy supports a more centralised state instead of promoting ethnic federalism. In addition, although the OLF became a political party, its military wing, the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), rejected the agreement and started a new rebellion, which led the government to designate it a terrorist group in May 2021. Since then, violence has been on the rise. There have also been recurring clashes between Somali herding communities and Oromo farming communities in the border areas between Oromia and Somali over competition for resources and the demarcation of the territories of both communities, with the climate emergency and the repressive intervention of the Liyu government police force exacerbating the situation.

**The situation in the Ethiopian region of Oromia continued to be extremely serious in 2023, with persistent clashes and attacks by the armed group Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) and counterinsurgency actions by federal security forces.** In 2023, the federal government of Ethiopia lost the support of the Amhara Fano militias, which turned against it and mostly retreated to the Amhara region, though some members remained in Oromia or came back to carry out attacks. All armed actors committed serious human rights violations against civilians. The Oromo armed group OLA has also been accused of committing widespread atrocities against the Amhara in the Oromia region, in revenge for acts of repression and violence committed by the Amhara Fano militias, though the OLA has denied that it is persecuting the Amhara community in the region. Fighting between the federal security forces and the OLA intensified in October 2022, coinciding with the negotiations that culminated in the peace agreement in November 2022 between the Ethiopian federal government and the political and military authorities of the Tigray region. After the agreement was signed and its implementation began, the federal authorities escalated attacks against the OLA. Pressure from the local authorities of the Oromia region, as well as the shared interest of the OLA

60. The Guardian, "Ethiopia declares a state of emergency in Amhara amid increasing violence", *The Guardian*, 4 August 2023.

61. ACLED, *Dashboard* [Viewed on 31 January 2024].

and the federal government to reach some type of truce, led to several indirect exploratory contacts in February 2023 between both parties, reflecting their interest in achieving a cessation of hostilities. In the midst of this climate of violence, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said he was committed to exploring dialogue with the OLA in March. Since the OLA had required third-party mediation, Kenyan-facilitated peace talks began in Zanzibar (Tanzania) on 25 April on behalf of the IGAD regional authority and Norway. Though this first round ended without progress in early May, both parties expressed their commitment to seeking a solution to the conflict. Since then, violence persisted with serious consequences for the civilian population. However, a second negotiating round that began in late October in Tanzania, mediated by the IGAD, was made public in November.<sup>62</sup> Hostilities resumed after the negotiations fell apart in November, increasing attacks with drone airstrikes and raising tensions between Amhara armed militias that did not retreat to the Amhara region, local Amhara militias in the Oromia region and Amhara militias launching attacks on Oromia from the Amhara region on the one side and Oromo groups on the other side, as well as their respective civilian populations, provoking an increase in attacks against civilians. These attacks could be described as ethnic cleansing carried out by the Amhara Fano militias and by the OLA in places like the North Shewa zone, in the Oromia region, home to a significant Amhara community. In this sense, Fano militia groups penetrated the Oromia region, especially the zones of West Shewa and North Shewa, with the aim of attacking the Oromo civilian population.

According to data gathered by ACLED,<sup>63</sup> in 2023 there were 572 violent events (battles, violence against civilians and improvised explosive devices) in the Oromia region, which claimed 1,642 lives, fewer than in 2022, when there were 707 violent events in which 4,533 people died.<sup>64</sup>

Meanwhile, the AU International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, which had a UN mandate, published a report in September warning that Eritrean troops and the Fano militias continued to commit serious atrocities in Tigray. Specifically, the report stated that despite the ceasefire between the government and the TPLF, Eritrean troops and the Amhara militia remained in the Tigray region and continued to commit atrocities against civilians, including rape and sexual violence against women and girls. Since its initial visit in 2022, the Commission has not been granted access to Ethiopia. Following this report and the denial of access to the Commission, the UN Human Rights Council suspended

the Commission's mandate in October, meaning that there is no longer any independent mechanism investigating atrocities in Ethiopia.

Somalia	
<b>Start:</b>	1988
<b>Type:</b>	Government, System Internationalised internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Federal government, regional pro-government forces, Somaliland, Puntland, clan militias and warlords, Ahlu Sunna Waljama'a, USA, France, Ethiopia, Türkiye, ATMIS, EUNAVFOR Somalia (Operation Atalanta), Combined Task Force 151, al-Shabaab, ISIS
<b>Intensity:</b>	3
<b>Trend:</b>	↑

**Summary:**

The armed conflict and the absence of effective central authority in the country have their origins in 1988, when a coalition of opposing groups rebelled against the dictatorial power of Siad Barre and three years later managed to overthrow him. This situation led to a new fight within this coalition to occupy the power vacuum, which had led to the destruction of the country and the death of more than 300,000 people since 1991, despite the failed international intervention at the beginning of the 1990s. The diverse peace processes to try and establish a central authority came across numerous difficulties, including the affronts between the different clans and sub clans of which the Somalia and social structure was made up, the interference of Ethiopia and Eritrea and the power of the various warlords. The last peace initiative was in 2004 by the GFT, which found support in Ethiopia to try to recover control of the country, partially in the hands of the ICU (Islamic Courts Union) The moderate faction of the ICU has joined the GFT and together they confront the militias of the radical faction of the ICU which control part of the southern area of the country. In 2012 the transition that began in 2004 was completed and a new Parliament was formed which elected its first president since 1967. The AU mission, AMISOM (which included the Ethiopian and Kenyan troops present in the country) and government troops are combating al-Shabaab, a group that has suffered internal divisions.

**The armed conflict in Somalia continued to intensify compared to previous years. The African mission in the country (ATMIS) stepped up its operations in 2023,<sup>65</sup> as did the Somali National Army and its local and international allies. The armed group al-Shabaab also increased its attacks.** In recent years, Somalia has intensified its attacks against al-Shabaab with the support of clans, local militias and regional and international allies to fulfil the promises made

62. Africanews, "Second round of talks between Ethiopian government and Oromo rebels", *Africanews*, 9 November 2023.

63. ACLED, *Dashboard* [Viewed on 31 January 2024].

64. These figures should be taken with caution since they combine violence directly linked to the armed conflict, in addition to acts of repression of social mobilizations against government actions and acts of ethnic cleansing against the civilian population. This figure also includes acts of violence against the minority of the Amhara community present in the Oromiya region perpetrated by elements of the Oromiya regional government and the OLA, as well as clashes between community militias from Somali livestock communities and Oromo agricultural communities that claim hundreds of fatalities every year. Therefore, there are real problems in determining the true number of fatalities linked to this armed conflict.

65. The AU mission in the country, AMISOM, was transformed into the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) in April 2022.

by President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud to focus his attention on the war against al-Shabaab to stabilise the country since he came to power in May 2022.<sup>66</sup> Despite these attempts to stop al-Shabaab, it could still carry out complex and asymmetric attacks in Somalia, as noted by the UN Panel of Experts in October. However, this international panel noted “encouraging” signs that the offensive had undermined al-Shabaab’s ability to govern and influence the newly liberated territory. Nevertheless, the panel added, the government will face the double pressure of coordinating the next phase of the offensive while managing several “containment” operations in the central states of Hirshabelle and Galmudug.<sup>67</sup> The Islamic State (ISIS) faction in Somalia remained operational and carried out attacks, but they were largely limited to the region of Bari, in northeastern Puntland. The group suffered a setback in January 2023 with the death of Bilal al-Sudani, the head of fundraising for Al-Karrar (ISIS) in Somalia. Meanwhile, the armed conflict between ISIS and al-Shabaab dragged on. Given the relative progress made in fighting the armed groups, the AU accepted the Somali federal government’s request to extend ATMIS phase 2 for three months in October. This transferred the decision to the UN Security Council, which agreed in November. The decision put off the withdrawal of 3,000 troops until 31 December 2023 after phase 1 had been completed, sending 2,000 troops home in June 2023 and reducing the military and police component of the ATMIS to 17,626 troops (including 1,040 police officers). The objective remained to complete the transition and fully withdraw ATMIS in December 2024.

**The Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS)<sup>68</sup> indicated that deaths related to the conflict in Somalia increased by 22% in 2023, reaching a record of 7,643 fatalities.** Virtually all this violence is attributed to incidents involving al-Shabaab. This figure triples the deaths since 2020, according to ACSS calculations. Most violent events (65%) and deaths (77%) were battle-related, reflecting the continuing government-led offensive against al-Shabaab. In Kenya, the number of deaths doubled over the previous year and reached 279

***The Somali federal government’s offensive against al-Shabaab enjoyed local, regional and international support but it did not reduce the group’s ability to counterattack or to carry out more frequent or complex attacks***

***The conflict in Somalia was compounded with the worst drought in decades in 2023, followed by the most severe floods in generations, according to OCHA***

as a result of violence linked to al-Shabaab in 2023, mainly on Kenyan soil along the border with Somalia, although 96% of the war-related deaths occurred in Somalia. **According to ACLED, in 2023 the number of fatalities rose to 7,912 in Somalia and 2,536 violent events were reported,**<sup>69</sup> in keeping with the upward trend in 2022 (with 6,418 deaths), 2021 (3,286) and 2020 (3,236). Combined with the worst drought in decades in 2023 and followed by the most severe floods in generations (within a few months of each other), the conflict has caused 4.3 million people (21% of the population) to face higher and critical levels of food insecurity (phase 3+ of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification or IPC, according to the FAO).<sup>70</sup> OCHA warned that 40% of all

five-year-old children suffer from acute malnutrition, 3.8 million people have been displaced (80% of which are women and children) and cholera has broken out in different parts of the country. The country also continued to suffer from devastating gender violence, as explained by the executive director of UN Women, Sima Bahous, at the UN Security Council meeting held in February. Rates of sexual violence have risen alarmingly since 2020. They doubled in 2022 compared to 2019 and continue to climb. This situation was compounded by the consequences of climate change, with the worst drought in many decades, which had a devastating impact on all Somalis, with women and girls suffering disproportionately. Armed groups, especially al-Shabaab, continued to abduct women and girls, forcing families to give their daughters to marry fighters, occupying hospitals and maternity wards and silencing and threatening local people who denounced these activities, making impunity widespread. Somalia continued to be one of the worst countries in the world for journalists, according to the National Union of Somali Journalists,<sup>71</sup> since they were threatened by the government, al-Shabaab and some militias and clans. This situation did not improve after the change of government

in 2022. The country continued to be ranked the most dangerous for journalists in Africa for the ninth year in a row, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists’ Global Impunity Index, and the second most dangerous in the world, after Syria,<sup>72</sup> though the serious escalation

66. ACLED, *Somalia: Conflict Expands to Galmudug State*, 24 March 2023.

67. UN Security Council, *Letter dated 25 August 2023 from the Panel of Experts on Somalia addressed to the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolution 751 (1992) concerning Al-Shabaab*, S/2023/724, 2 October 2023.

68. Africa Center for Strategic Studies, *Deaths Linked to Militant Islamist Violence in Africa Continue to Spiral*, 29 January 2024.

69. This figure takes into account violent events (battles, violence against civilians and improvised explosive devices) in Somalia as a whole, excluding the five regions that make up Somaliland (Awdal, Woqooyi Galbeed, Togdheer, Sool and Sanaag). If considering Somalia as a whole, this figure would increase to 2,662 violent events and 8,341 fatalities in 2023. ACLED, *Dashboard* [Viewed on 31 January 2024].

70. OCHA, Somalia, *Dashboard* [Viewed on 31 January 2024].

71. Somali Journalists Syndicate, *SJS Annual Report 2022: State of Press Freedom in Somalia*, 31 January 2023.

72. Somalia has ranked first in the world for the past eight years. This drop to second place does not indicate any improvement in its record of impunity, but rather is caused by the method used to calculate the rankings. See CPJ, *Global Impunity Index 2023*, 31 October 2023.



of violence in Gaza starting on 7 October relegated them to the second and third position.

The UN Panel of Experts confirmed al-Shabaab's ability to take advantage of geographic discontinuity in Somali National Army positions, assimilate into local communities during tactical withdrawals and conduct counterattacks against pro-government militias and forward operating bases. These capabilities indicated that al-Shabaab remained resilient, adaptable and lethal. Even though al-Shabaab was expelled from large parts of central Somalia, several of its middle and senior leaders were killed during the year and at least two of its commanders surrendered, it was able to replace the slain leaders by others who had already been trained, increased the tempo of its operations and carried out complex attacks. In May 2023, it carried out the most serious attack of the year against the Ugandan ATMIS forward operating base in Buulo Mareer (Lower Shabelle region, South West State). Whereas al-Shabaab claimed that the attack killed 137 soldiers, Ugandan military sources said it killed around 100. According to the UN Panel of Experts, al-Shabaab continued to use suicide attacks (11) and car bombs (29)<sup>73</sup> as its main weapons against the security forces and state infrastructure, as well as increasingly sophisticated attacks with improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Furthermore, the offensive against al-Shabaab inside Somalia and along its border lacked effective national and international cooperation. The government offensive initially weakened the group, but it faced delays in mobilising troops from the ATMIS countries on the front line (Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya, as part of Operation Black Lion, agreed at the beginning of the year and reaffirmed in August). Given the reduction of the ATMIS mission, new problems are likely to arise.

Various analysts discussed problems of governability and cooperation between the federal government and the federated member states, where the difficulties in guaranteeing security and public services are combined with the member states' desire to prolong their mandate. In this context, different actors exploited this weak governance in favour of their own interests, with corruption proliferating, such as the embezzlement of public income from fishing by intermediaries. **The announcement on 1 January 2024 that Ethiopia**

***The agreement between Ethiopia and Somaliland triggered a serious diplomatic crisis between both and Somalia that could affect Ethiopia's involvement in the AU mission (ATMIS) and the offensive against al-Shabaab***

**and Somaliland had signed a memorandum of understanding<sup>74</sup> triggered a serious diplomatic crisis**

**between them and Somalia** that took on regional dimensions due to the politics of Ethiopia and Somalia's regional alliances. This agreement would give landlocked Ethiopia the opportunity to acquire a naval base and commercial maritime service in the Gulf of Aden through a leasing agreement, according to the Ethiopian and Somaliland administrations. In exchange, according to Somaliland's President Muse Bihi Abdi, Ethiopia would internationally recognise the region as an independent country. Addis Abeba clarified that it still had to evaluate that request.<sup>75</sup> Ethiopia has historically sought to diversify its access to the sea, since 95% of its trade is carried out through Djibouti, and in recent months Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed had indicated that the issue was existential for Ethiopia. This provoked reactions from neighbouring Eritrea and relations between the two countries deteriorated.

Somalia declared the agreement void and even threatened Ethiopia with starting a war if necessary to preserve its national sovereignty, as Somalia still considers Somaliland a part of Somalia, despite its de facto independence since 1991, which lacks international recognition. According to various analysts,<sup>76</sup> though a confrontation between both countries is unlikely, the agreement could seriously damage relations between both countries and have consequences in the war against al-Shabaab, since Somalia's disapproval of Ethiopia could put pressure on Ethiopian involvement in Somalia and end in Ethiopia's withdrawal from the AU mission (ATMIS), to which it is one of the main troop contributors.<sup>77</sup> In November, the UN Security Council extended the mandate of ATMIS until 30 June 2024.

Somalia (Somaliland – SSC-Khatumo)	
<b>Start:</b>	2023
<b>Type:</b>	Self-government, Identity, Territory Internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Republic of Somaliland, SSC-Khatumo administration (Khatumo State), Puntland State, al-Shabaab
<b>Intensity:</b>	1
<b>Trend:</b>	↑

73. Figures related to the period covered by the report of the UN Panel of Experts, between 16 December 2022 and 15 August 2023.

74. Ali, Faisal, "Ethiopia and Somaliland reach agreement over access to ports", *The Guardian*, 1 January 2024.

75. The agreement revolves around the port of Berbera, which was recently expanded by the UAE-based port logistics company DP World. For further information, see the summary on Somalia-Somaliland in chapter 2 (Peace negotiations in Africa), in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

76. Weldemariam, Alemayehu, "Ethiopia's deal with Somaliland upends regional dynamics, risking strife across the Horn of Africa", *The Conversation*, 13 January 2024.

77. See the summary on Somalia-Somaliland in chapter 2, (Peace negotiations in Africa) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

---

### Summary:

In early 2023, fighting intensified between the security forces of Somaliland and militias from the regions of Sool, Sannag and Cayn, which form part of Somaliland and call themselves SSC-Khatumo. Somaliland and Puntland are involved in a historical dispute over control of these border regions that dates back to 1998, when Puntland was established as an autonomous republic. The dispute has devolved into an armed conflict between the militias of these regions and Somaliland. The three regions of Sool, Sannag and Cayn are geographically located within the borders of Somaliland, though most clans in Sool, Sannag and Cayn (called SSC, by their initials) are associated with those of Puntland, so the SSC militias are allies of Puntland. Since the 1990s, there have been sporadic clashes and attempts at mediation between Puntland and Somaliland and between Somaliland and the SSC militias. In 2012, Khatumo State was created, including part of the regions of Sool, Sanaag and Cayn, calling itself SSC-Khatumo, which added more complexity to the situation. SSC-Khatumo is located within Somaliland, which claims to be independent, yet is opposed by these regions, which have gradually expressed their desire to become a new state of Somalia. In 2016, the SSC-Khatumo administration and Somaliland began peace talks. However, tensions simmered and sporadic clashes continued intermittently between the security forces of Somaliland and the SSC-Khatumo militias until 2023, when the situation escalated, leaving hundreds of people dead.

---

**Fighting between the security forces of Somaliland and local militias mainly from the Dhulbahante clan intensified in early 2023, leading to what appeared to be a new armed conflict. The epicentre of the violence was Las Anod, the capital of the disputed Sool region, where fighting raged throughout the year.** The violence broke out in late December 2022, when fighting began between protesters and security forces in Las Anod that claimed at least 20 civilians' lives. Protesters complained about a lack of security in the city, which had been suffering regular killings in recent years, including the 26 December assassination of local leader Abdifatah Abdullahi Abdi (otherwise known as "Hdrawi"), a member of the opposition Waddani Party. The use of heavy artillery and the recruitment of new fighters by Somaliland's security forces and SSC-Khatumo militias increased the risk of escalation in the fighting between the clan families and of the conflict's expansion beyond the Sool region. Some of Somaliland's political leaders resigned to reject the president of Somaliland's militaristic approach to the dispute. **According to ACLED, there were 367 fatalities in a total of 91 violent events in 2023 (battles, violence against civilians and improvised explosive devices).**<sup>78</sup>

There are conflicting accounts about the origins and reasons for the conflict. Somaliland pointed to various actors and armed groups in the Las Anod conflict, including Puntland, al-Shabaab and other groups

opposed to peace. In talks with the UN Panel of Experts,<sup>79</sup> officials from Somaliland said that al-Shabaab was taking advantage of the conflict to expand its influence towards northern Somalia and was trying to build a corridor between the Galgala mountains (Puntland) and Jijiga (Ethiopia) passing through Las Anod and Buuhoodle, which would give it new avenues from which to carry out external attacks in Djibouti and Ethiopia and expand its access to the Gulf of Aden. Somaliland is considered a bulwark against al-Shabaab's regional expansion. While the UN Panel of Experts did receive information from Somaliland about al-Shabaab's possible involvement in the December 2022 assassination of the activist and politician that sparked the current conflict, it has not yet seen any credible evidence of al-Shabaab's alleged expansion in the north. Overall, Somaliland maintained that it had only acted in self-defence and had refrained from attacking clan militias in Las Anod, while repeating its commitment to seek a peaceful solution and support future international and regional efforts to end the fighting. On 9 February 2023, al-Shabaab released a statement through its media foundation Al-Kata'ib denying any involvement in the Las Anod conflict caused by the government of Somaliland.

On the other side of the conflict is the Dhulbahante clan, whose elders returned to Las Anod in January 2023. A month later, they issued a statement rejecting Somaliland's demand for independence<sup>80</sup> and announcing their intention to become part of Somalia. On 6 July, the Dhulbahante elders appointed a 45-member committee to create the executive body of the state of SSC-Khatumo (new administration proclaimed by the Dhulbahante clan community), which elected Abdiqadir Ahmed Aw-Ali (popularly known as "Firdhiye") as president on 5 August 2023. In October, Somaliland's President Muse Bihi said that Somaliland would not accept a separate administration in Sool, referring to SSC-Khatumo. Meanwhile, the president of SSC-Khatumo visited the Somali capital of Mogadishu from 6 to 22 October and repeated his desire to form a new Somali member state during talks with Somali Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre and President Mohamud. Local media reported on 19 October that Mogadishu had recognised SSC-Khatumo as an interim administration. In line with this decision, and to express its autonomy from Puntland, on 23 December SSC-Khatumo rejected participation in the Puntland elections scheduled for January 2024 and insisted on becoming an autonomous state of Somalia.

Fighting in July affected the Las Anod hospital, wounding aid workers and medical staff and prompting the NGO MsF to withdraw from the hospital. Combat involving heavy artillery and mortar fire intensified on

---

78. ACLED, *Dashboard* [Viewed on 31 January 2024].

79. UN Security Council, *Letter dated 25 August 2023 from the Panel of Experts on Somalia addressed to the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolution 751 (1992) concerning Al-Shabaab*, S/2023/724, 2 October 2023.

80. See the summary on Somalia in this chapter and the summary on Somalia-Somaliland in chapter 2 (Peace negotiations in Africa) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.



25 August, leading to the withdrawal of Somaliland's forces and the loss of more territory to the Dhulbahante clan militia. After the first clashes, some regional and international mediation initiatives were proposed, even by neighbouring Ethiopia, as highlighted by the UN Panel of Experts. However, all these initiatives failed.<sup>81</sup> In early April, Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud appointed Abdikarim Hussein Guled as the federal government's envoy for Somaliland affairs. In June, the UN Security Council called for Somaliland's security forces to immediately withdraw from Las Anod, calling on the parties to exercise restraint and refrain from provocative actions and incitement to violence. Somaliland countered that the Security Council did not recognise al-Shabaab's involvement in the conflict and all the implications that had for peace and security in the region. Puntland's President Said Abdullahi Deni promised that his government would openly support the people of Khatumo State if the Somaliland government ignored the Security Council's calls to withdraw and restore peace. A delegation of clan elders who had travelled to Las Anod and Hargeysa with the support of the federal government to discuss a ceasefire in May returned to Mogadishu on 15 July for further consultations. On 27 August, the UN, AU, IGAD, EU and others condemned the escalation of the conflict in the area around Las Anod and called for an immediate ceasefire, an end to the mobilisation and respect for human rights and international humanitarian law by all parties involved. The UN remained committed to promote dialogue and a cessation of hostilities. By the end of the year, fighting between Somaliland's security forces and Dhulbahante clan militias subsided.

## Maghreb - North Africa

Libya	
<b>Start:</b>	2011
<b>Type:</b>	Government, Resources, System Internationalised internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Unity Government with headquarters in Tripoli, National Stability Government (NSG) with headquarters in Tobruk, armed groups including the Libyan National Army (LNA, also called Arab Libyan Armed Forces, ALAF), ISIS, AQIM, mercenaries and Wagner Group, Türkiye
<b>Intensity:</b>	1
<b>Trend:</b>	=
<b>Summary:</b> In the context of the uprisings in North Africa, popular protests against the government of Muammar Gaddafi began in February 2011. In power since 1969, his regime was characterized by an authoritarian stance repression of dissent, corruption and serious shortcomings at the	

institutional level. Internal conflict degenerated into an escalation of violence leading to a civil war and an international military intervention by NATO forces. After months of fighting and the capture and execution of Gaddafi in late October, the rebels announced the liberation of Libya. However, the country remains affected by high levels of violence derived from multiple factors, including the inability of the new authorities to control the country and ensure a secure environment; the high presence of militias unwilling to surrender their weapons; and disputes over resources and trafficking routes. The situation in the country deteriorated from mid-2014 onward, with higher levels of violence and persistent political fragmentation. Efforts to solve the situation have been hampered by this scene of fragmentation and a climate of instability has assisted the expansion of ISIS in the North African country. The dynamics of violence have been accentuated by the involvement of foreign actors in support of the various opposing sides, motivated by geopolitical and economic interests, given Libya's strategic location in the Mediterranean basin and its great oil wealth.

**The trend of the decrease in deaths associated with the armed conflict observed since the ceasefire agreement of October 2020 continued throughout 2023, but in a context of political impasse, power struggles between the rival governments controlling the country and failure to resolve underlying problems** that affected its prospects for political and economic stability and security. According to data collected by ACLED, 89 people died in acts of violence linked to the conflict in 2023 (battles, explosions or remote violence and violence against civilians). This is a body count similar to those of recent years (157 in 2022 and 115 in 2021) and significantly lower than those reported in the years immediately preceding the ceasefire (around 1,500 in 2020 and 2,000 in 2019). Throughout the year, the general security situation in the country remained fragile and clashes occurred in Tripoli, Benghazi and Gharyan (west), which illustrated the fragmentation of security actors, the problems stemming from the lack of a central command and the struggles to control territories and resources. Thus, the most serious armed clashes of 2023 occurred in August, when two days of fighting between the Deterrence Agency for Combating Organised Crime and Terrorism and the 444 Combat Brigade in a densely populated area of Tripoli caused the death of 55 people. Another serious episode occurred in October, when Khalifa Haftar's armed group LNA tried to arrest the former Minister of Defence of the Government of National Accord (GNA), provoking armed clashes with militias allied with the former cabinet member. The incident ended with an unknown number of deaths and people missing. There were also clashes over the control of illegal activities, hostilities between various LNA units in Benghazi and fighting between the LNA and criminal groups during the year. Warnings were issued about the potential destabilising effects that the conflict in Sudan could have on Libya and about

81. UN Security Council, *Letter dated 25 August 2023 from the Panel of Experts on Somalia addressed to the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolution 751 (1992) concerning Al-Shabaab*, S/2023/724, 2 October 2023.

the possible impacts of the crisis in Chad in southern Libya in 2023. The Chadian Army and armed opposition groups from Chad engaged in clashes in the border area. In August, the LNA carried out air strikes on the border and against Chadian opposition positions.

**The fragility of the situation on the North African country was also exposed in 2023 due to the disastrous consequences of Storm Daniel, which led to the destruction of two dams and the death and disappearance of thousands of people in Derna (east) in September.**

The counts were not precise, but the WHO estimated 4,000 deaths, around 8,500 people who disappeared and 43,000 people who were forcibly displaced. The unprecedented torrential rains (50 times more likely today than in the past due to climate change, according to experts) had devastating effects that are also explained by the long-term consequences of violence, institutional division and governance problems. Libyan groups demanded an independent investigation into responsibilities for maintaining structures and failures to evacuate at-risk communities. Later, the UN also warned Libyan authorities about parallel efforts to respond to the disaster and disputes over the control of reconstruction funds. The migrant and refugee population continued to be particularly vulnerable in Libya, also (but not only) because of Storm Daniel, which claimed 500 lives and made another 500 people disappear. The North African country continued to be a route for those trying to cross the Mediterranean towards Europe, albeit an extremely dangerous one, as 939 people who followed it died and 1,248 others went missing between January and November 2023. Another 15,000 people, including minors, were intercepted and returned to Libya in 2023. Human rights groups also continued to denounce militias and the Libyan authorities for human rights violations, including the persecution and harassment of civil society organisations.

Negotiations involving different local and international actors continued during 2023, but no definitive political agreement to hold elections was achieved. The elections had originally been planned for December 2021.<sup>82</sup> Thus, the impasse persisted that had led to the formation of two rival governments in early 2022, one based in Tripoli (the Government of National Unity (GNU), recognised by the UN) and another established in eastern Libya (the Government of National Stability (GNS), aligned with the House of Representatives in Tobruk and with General Khalifa Haftar's armed group LNA or ALAF). Efforts focused on defining a road map for the elections in 2023. However, controversies continued around the rules that should govern voting, including the configuration of a new interim government. In this context, at the end of the year the UN special envoy for Libya tried to promote dialogue between the

country's main institutional actors. Meanwhile, the 5+5 Joint Military Commission continued to monitor the implementation and provisions of the ceasefire agreement, such as the withdrawal of foreign forces and mercenaries from the country. However, in practice this withdrawal was compromised by the political impasse and the deterioration of the situation in the Sahel and Sudan, among other dynamics.

## Southern Africa

Mozambique (north)	
<b>Start:</b>	2017
<b>Type:</b>	System, Identity Internationalised internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Government, Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) or Islamic State Mozambique Province (ISMP)-formerly Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jama (ASWJ)-, al-Qaeda, South African private security company DAG (Dyck Advisory Group), Tanzania, Rwanda, South Africa, Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), "Naparama" local militias
<b>Intensity:</b>	1
<b>Trend:</b>	↓

### Summary:

Since late 2017, the province of Cabo Delgado in northern Mozambique has suffered an armed conflict led by Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jamo (ASWJ). The armed jihadist organisation made its first appearance in October 2017 when it attacked three police posts in the Mocímboa da Praia district in Cabo Delgado province. Since that time, Cabo Delgado has been the epicentre of rising violent activity in the country. While some reports claim that ASWJ fighters have received training in Tanzania and Somalia, which has led locals to call them al-Shabaab, alluding to the Somali jihadist group, no significant links to international jihadist networks have been established. The causes of the outbreak of violence refer rather to factors linked to the grievances and marginalisation of the Muslim minority in Mozambique (22% of the population), as well as to the extreme poverty of what is the most underdeveloped province in the country. Poverty rates in Cabo Delgado contrast with its enormous economic potential due to its significant natural gas reserves, which have generated significant investment in the area, but this has not helped to reduce inequality and poverty among its population. Since the end of 2017, the Mozambican security forces have developed a security policy that has increased repression and retaliation in the area, influencing new factors that trigger violence. In 2018, the group intensified its use of violence against civilians and expanded the scope of its operations, leading to the deployment of international forces from Rwanda and the SADC Standby Force Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) in the country to help the government to combat the insurgency in mid-2021.

82. See the summary on Libya in chapter 2 (Peace negotiations in Africa) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

**Violence in the province of Cabo Delgado fell significantly during the year, with 71% fewer armed incidents compared to the previous year and an 80% drop in violent attacks against civilians.** According to ACLED data, a total of 170 violent events were reported during the year (battles, violence against civilians and attacks with improvised explosive devices) that caused 271 deaths in Cabo Delgado. This is a huge decline compared to 2022, when 905 deaths were reported, and to 2021, when 1,067 people were killed in the province.<sup>83</sup> The Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) reported an 80% decrease in violence against civilians, with 61 deaths reported, compared to the 437 reported in 2022, when violence had increased by 57% over 2021.<sup>84</sup> The waning violence was due to the combined effects of the intervention of the Southern African Development Community's Standby Force Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) and of Rwandan forces that were deployed in July 2021 to help the Mozambican government to battle the jihadist insurgency, Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) or "Wilayah Wasat Ifriqiya". The joint intervention of national and international forces helped the government to regain control of 90% of the land that had fallen into the hands of the insurgency. Among other things, this allowed the authorities to reopen the Tanzanian border on 11 September through the Namoto border crossing between Cabo Delgado and the Tanzanian province of Mtwara after remaining closed for two years due to insecurity. At the end of the year, the main focus of instability in the province remained the rural areas in the northeastern part of Macomia district. Since the violence started in the region in late 2017, it is estimated that the conflict has claimed around 5,000 lives. By the end of 2023, 850,000 people had been internally displaced in the four northern provinces of Cabo Delgado, Niassa, Nampula and Zambezia.

The most significant events of the year included the launch of a new counterinsurgency operation by the Mozambican government and the SAMIM in Cabo Delgado on 1 January. Dubbed "Operation Vulcão IV", it was aimed at controlling the Messalo River basin in Muidumbe district and the nearby forests to the north and west in Macomia district. In February, the ISCAP insurgents launched an outreach campaign to ask communities for support. This change in strategy was interpreted as an attempt to get the population's help and to secure supply lines to compensate for the territory lost since the deployment of SAMIM and Rwandan troops. In April, the government of Mozambique issued a decree granting legal authority to and regulating the operation of community militias known as "Naparama" that emerged to combat the insurgency in Cabo Delgado in 2022. This decree finalised the process to legalise

***Violence in the province of Cabo Delgado in Mozambique fell by nearly 70% in 2023 over the previous year***

these militias, which had begun when Parliament passed a law in late 2022 that recognised them as a force linked to the government. After relative calm between March and April due to the rainy season and Ramadan, there was an intensification of ISCAP violence, mainly in the coastal districts, which caused the Mozambican Army and international forces to step up their activity along the Macomia coast. In this context, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) renewed the SAMIM's mandate for one more year on 11 July. Later, in August, the Mozambican Army announced the death of three senior ISCAP commanders, including Ibn Omar, the organisation's alleged leader in Mozambique, in an operation carried out in the forests of Macomia. By the end of the year, the insurgents had advanced towards the southern districts of Meluco and Quissanga in Cabo Delgado, prompting the Mozambican Army to fortify its positions against a possible attack on the provincial capital, Pemba. In late November, the president of the Islamic Council of Mozambique announced the creation of an international commission to promote peace talks between the government and the insurgents in Cabo Delgado.

## West Africa

Cameroon (Ambazonia/North West and South West)	
Start:	2018
Type:	Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government of Cameroon, Government of Nigeria, a political-military secessionist movement including the opposition Ambazonia Coalition Team (ACT, including IG Sako, to which belong the armed groups Lebialem Red Dragons and SOCADEF) and the Ambazonia Governing Council (AGovC, including IG Sisiku, whose armed wing is the Ambazonia Defence Forces, ADF), various different militias and smaller armed groups
Intensity:	2
Trend:	=
Summary:	After Germany's defeat in the First World War, Cameroon came under the mandate of the League of Nations and was divided between French Cameroon and British Cameroon. In 1961, the two territories that made up British Cameroon held a referendum limiting their self-determination to union with the already independent Republic of Cameroon (formerly French Cameroon) or union with Nigeria. The southern part of British Cameroon (a region currently corresponding to the provinces of North West and South West) decided to join the Republic of Cameroon, whereas

83. ACLED, [Dashboard](#) [Viewed on 12 February 2024].

84. Africa Center for Strategic Studies, *Deaths Linked to Militant Islamist Violence in Africa Continue to Spiral*, 29 January 2024.

the north preferred to join Nigeria. A poorly conducted re-unification in the 1960s based on centralisation and assimilation has led the English-speaking minority of what was once southern British Cameroon (20% of the country's population) to feel politically and economically marginalised by state institutions, which are controlled by the French-speaking majority. Their frustrations rose in late 2016, when a series of sector-specific grievances were transformed into political demands, which caused strikes, riots and a growing escalation of tension and government repression. This climate has led a majority of the population in the region demanding a new federal political status without ruling out secession and has prompted the resurgence of identity movements dating back to the 1970s. These movements demand a return to the federal model that existed between 1961 and 1972. Trust between English-speaking activists and the government was shaken by the arrest of the main figures of the federalist movement in January 2017, which has given a boost to groups supporting armed struggle as the only way to achieve independence. Since then, both English-speaking regions have experienced general strikes, school boycotts and sporadic violence. Insurgent activity has escalated since the secessionist movement's declaration of independence on 1 October and the subsequent government repression to quell it.

**The armed conflict between Cameroonian state security forces and the separatist political and military movements in the two English-speaking provinces in the southwestern part of the country continued to rage throughout the year.** According to data from the International Crisis Group and ACLED, the conflict has caused the deaths of around 6,000 people since 2018. According to ACLED, there were 429 fatalities in a total of 262 violent events in 2023 (battles, violence against civilians and improvised explosive attacks), slightly fewer than in 2022, when there were 525 deaths in 343 violent episodes. The security forces were unable to stop the armed groups' attacks despite the defections of some insurgent leaders, such as David Dibo and Ekpe Jerome. By the end of 2023, a total of 621,591 people remained displaced within the country as a result of violence in both regions and around 90,000 people were refugees in neighbouring Nigeria, according to UNHCR data. In recent years, the violence has spread to the surrounding regions of Littoral, Centre and West due to the political and military movements' aim to expand the conflict beyond the two separatist regions. Different political and military groups met in Canada to unify their negotiating strategy alongside the exploratory contacts facilitated by Canada with government representatives of Cameroon.<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile, the leaders of the insurgent group Ambazonia Governing Council (AGovC), Ayaba Cho Lucas, and of the Nigerian rebel group Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Simon Ekpa, reached a military cooperation agreement in Helsinki. Explosions and the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) increased to

the highest level since November 2021. There was a rise in tension and violence on various notable dates, such as the eve of the elections to the Senate on 12 March, boycotted by the armed groups, which attacked civilians who had violated their boycott in the English-speaking regions; 20 May, National Day, considered a key anniversary marking the beginning of the conflict when the constitutional referendum repealed the Anglophone federal state of West Cameroon and the Francophone federal state of East Cameroon in 1972; the start of the school year in September, forcing the closure of schools; and 1 October, the anniversary of the declaration of independence of the self-proclaimed Federal Republic of Ambazonia. Thousands of people demonstrated throughout the country, calling for peace and reconciliation during the days running up to the National Day celebrations. Peace caravans led by singers, activists, clerics and traditional rulers called for an end to hate speech and armed conflict. In the capital, Yaoundé, thousands of Christians from Cameroon's Catholic, Presbyterian and Baptist churches joined the protest on 18 May.<sup>86</sup> Coinciding with National Day, separatist insurgents kidnapped around 30 women demonstrating against the armed groups' extortion of them. On 29 July, the separatist movement demanded a halt to all activities in Bamenda, declaring it a "dead city" in an attempt to disrupt the funeral of Cameroonian opposition leader Ni John Fru Ndi due to his bid for a united Cameroon.

OCHA indicated that 255 humanitarian organisations provided assistance to 2.7 million vulnerable people out of a total of 4.7 million in need of support. Nine of Cameroon's 10 regions continued to be affected by three complex humanitarian crises: the Lake Chad Basin conflict (affecting the Far North region), the North West and South West crisis and the impact of the influx of refugees from the CAR into the regions of East, Adamawa and North. In July, Amnesty International reported that security forces, separatist groups and ethnic self-defence militias, promoted or tolerated by the Cameroonian Army, which had instigated the Fulani Mbororo community against the English-speaking rebels, had committed atrocities in the region of North West, including cases of extrajudicial killing, torture and rape since 2020.<sup>87</sup> Finally, faced with the wave of coups d'état in Central and West Africa and after Gabonese President Ali Bongo Ondimba was ousted in late August, Cameroonian President Paul Biya replaced several colonels in the Cameroonian Army. Biya's party swept the Senate elections in March, with the president having used all the power of the state to benefit his party and limit freedom of expression. In control of 95% of the Senate, speculation continued about the nonagenarian leader's health and successor.

85. See the summary on Cameroon in chapter 2 (Peace negotiations in Africa) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

86. Kindzeka, Moki Edwin, 'Cameroon Calls for Peace, Reconciliation Ahead of Country's National Day', *Voice of America*, 18 May 2023.

87. Amnesty International, *Cameroon: with or against us: people of the North-West region of Cameroon caught between the army, armed separatists and militias*, 4 July 2023.



Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram)	
<b>Start:</b>	2011
<b>Type:</b>	System Internationalised internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Government of Nigeria, Civilian Joint Task Force pro-government militia, Boko Haram factions (ISWAP, JAS-Abubakar Shekau, Ansaru, Bakura), civilian militias, MNJTF (Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger)
<b>Intensity:</b>	3
<b>Trend:</b>	=

#### Summary:

The jihadist-inspired sect Boko Haram demands the establishment of an Islamic state in Nigeria and considers that Nigeria's public institutions are "westernised" and, therefore, decadent. The group forms part of the fundamentalist branch initiated by other groups in Nigeria following independence in 1960 and which, invariably, triggered outbreaks of violence of varying intensity. Despite the heavy repression to which its followers have been subjected—in 2009, at least 800 of its members died in confrontations with the army and the police in Bauchi State—the armed group remains active. The scope of its attacks has widened, aggravating insecurity in the country as the government proves incapable of offering an effective response to put an end to the violence. International human rights organizations have warned of the crimes committed by the group, but also on government abuses in its campaign against the organization. In 2015 the conflict expanded to the Lake Chad Basin and affected border areas of neighbouring countries with the Nigerian region: the Extrême Nord region in Cameroon, Diffa in Niger and the province of Lac in Chad. Since mid-2016 Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon have developed a regional strategy of military pressure on BH through the implementation of a regional joint military force (MNJTF), which has highlighted the group's resilience and also the unwillingness of the Nigerian political and military authorities to deal with the situation, in addition to the shortcomings of the Nigerian Armed Forces, which have serious internal corruption problems. BH has split into four factions: The Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad (JAS) faction, led by Abubakar Shekau, leader of BH since 2009; Ansaru, which aligned with al-Qaeda in 2012 and had not committed any military actions since 2013 until early 2020; Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), which split from JAS in 2016; and finally Bakura, an ISWAP splinter group that emerged in 2018 and subsequently moved closer to Shekau in opposition to ISWAP.

**The activities of the different Boko Haram (BH) factions continued during the year in the Lake Chad basin region**, which includes northeastern Nigeria (mainly Borno State, and to a lesser extent the states of Yobe and Adamawa), the Far North region in Cameroon, Diffa in Niger and Lac province in Chad, despite counterinsurgency operations. The violence caused new population displacements and human rights violations by all the armed actors involved, as noted by different human rights defence organisations. The conflict has

caused around 40,000 fatalities since it began in 2011. According to the research centre ACLED, 3,828 deaths were reported in the Lake Chad basin region (the Nigerian states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa; the Far North region in Cameroon; Diffa in Niger; and Lac province in Chad) in 2023, a figure similar to that of 2022 (3,782) and slightly lower than in 2021 (4,163). Moreover, 1,310 violent events occurred in 2023, more than the 1,002 in 2022 and 982 in 2021.<sup>88</sup>

The Nigerian state of Bauchi, which borders the epicentre of the conflict in northeastern Nigeria, was also affected by the geographical spread of the insecurity and violence starting in September. Security had improved in recent years, but a spike in attacks by armed groups fleeing military operations in neighbouring states caused a new surge in violence. However, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) was less active in other north-central states (Kano, Kogi, Niger and Taraba) in 2023 compared to 2022.<sup>89</sup>

The Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS)<sup>90</sup> said that violent events caused by jihadists increased by a quarter during 2023 (to 1,208 armed actions), reaching 3,769 fatalities and reversing the decline in violence in the region since 2020. In 2020 and 2021, violence had fallen by around 32%. However, the conflict in the Lake Chad basin region remained the third deadliest in Africa, accounting for 16% of all deaths involving Islamist militants there, after the Western Sahel region and Somalia, according to the ACSS. Boko Haram and ISWAP were involved in almost all violent events connected to extremists in the region, while Ansaru, which operates in northwestern Nigeria, was virtually inactive. Boko Haram and ISWAP were involved in a roughly even amount of violent events, though they varied by type. ISWAP engaged more in battles and remote violence against security forces, while Boko Haram was responsible for 59% of the attacks against civilians. This corroborates previous reports that Boko Haram is the more violent of the two groups against civilians.

In an effort to control territory, resources and fighters, Boko Haram and ISWAP have been fighting each other as well as the national armies of the Lake Chad region. Therefore, **clashes increased between Boko Haram and ISWAP during the year as part of their battle for supremacy in the region. This intensification began with the death of Boko Haram's leader in 2021, following attacks in its stronghold in the Sambisa forest.** The deadliest fighting took place in August, when around 2100 combatants on both sides were killed near the town of Marte. According to the ICG, violence also escalated within both groups and inter-ethnic clashes among Boko Haram fighters claimed 82 lives in the Kukawa area in August. Meanwhile, ISWAP received

88. ACLED, [Dashboard](#) [Viewed on 31 January 2024].

89. See the summary on the Lake Chad region (Boko Haram) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, [Alert 2023! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding](#), Barcelona: Icaria, 2023.

90. Africa Center for Strategic Studies, [Deaths Linked to Militant Islamist Violence in Africa Continue to Spiral](#), 29 January 2024.



supplies of weapons and fighters from its jihadist allies, Islamic State Sahel Province.

In Nigeria specifically, this situation co-existed with widespread violence and criminality experienced mainly in the northwest, where 3,600 people were kidnapped and many killed in 2023. In March, 1,506 combatants and their families surrendered and in May, another 511 did the same after fighting with the Nigerian Army, according to military sources. In northeastern Nigeria, the area most affected by the BH factions' activities, 2.3 million people are estimated to have been displaced by violence, a figure that UNHCR extends to practically 3.1 million displaced people and around 285,000 refugees and asylum seekers in the entire Lake Chad basin region.<sup>91</sup>

Mali	
<b>Start:</b>	2012
<b>Type:</b>	System, Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Government, the Permanent Strategic Framework (CSP) which brings together the armed groups affiliated with CMA (MNLA, MAA faction, CPA, HCUA) and Platform (GATIA, CMPFPR, MAA faction)–, The Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wa al-Muslimeen) (JNIM or GSIM), Islamic State in the West Africa Province (ISWAP) –also known as Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)–, Katiba Macina, MINUSMA, Russia, Wagner Group
<b>Intensity:</b>	3
<b>Trend:</b>	↑
<b>Summary:</b>	
The Tuareg community that inhabits northern Mali has lived in a situation of marginalisation and underdevelopment since colonial times which has fuelled revolts and led to the establishment of armed fronts against the central government. In the nineties, after a brief armed conflict, a peace agreement was reached that promised investment and development for the north. The failure to implement the agreement made it impossible to halt the creation of new armed groups demanding greater autonomy for the area. The fall of the regime of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya in 2011, which for several years had been sheltering the Malian Tuareg insurgency and had absorbed a number of its members into its security forces, created conditions that favoured the resurgence of Tuareg rebels in the north of the country, who demand the independence of Azawad (the name which the Tuareg give to the northern region of Mali). After making progress in gaining control of the area by taking advantage of the political instability in Mali in early 2012, the Tuareg armed group, National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), was increasingly displaced	

by radical Islamist groups operating in the region which had made gains in the north of Mali. The internationalisation of the conflict intensified in 2013, following the military intervention of France and the deployment of a peacekeeping mission (MINUSMA) in the country. Although a peace agreement was signed in 2015 in the north of the country between the Arab-Tuareg groups (CMA and Platform), the exclusion of groups with jihadist agendas from the peace negotiations has kept the war going and extended the dynamics of the war to the central region of the country (Mopti).

**The security situation in Mali continued to deteriorate during the year due to the resumption of the war in the northern part of the country between the Malian government, supported by the Russian private security company Wagner Group, and the Arab and Tuareg armed groups that had signed the 2015 Algiers peace agreement, organised under the Permanent Strategic Framework coalition (CSP).** According to data from the ACLED research centre, 1,544 violent events (battles, violence against civilians and attacks with improvised explosive devices) were reported across the country in 2023. The attacks were concentrated in the northern and central regions and left 4,288 people dead, of which 1,848 lost their lives in northern Mali (Gao, Menaka, Timbuktu and Kidal).<sup>92</sup> These data show continuity with the dynamics of violence reported the previous year (1,340 violent events and 4,842 deaths). Though fewer deaths were observed, the number of violent episodes in the country increased due to the resumption of the war in the north, pitting the armed groups that had signed the peace agreement organised under the CSP, which brings together to CMA and Platform, against the Malian government in mid-August, opening a new front of instability. The deterioration of the security situation in the northern part of the country was exploited by jihadist coalitions active in the region (the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM or JNIM) and Islamic State in Greater Sahara (ISGS), also known as Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP)), which intensified violence in the north and maintained it in the central region (Mopti and Ségou). The rise in instability and insecurity remained in line with the trend of **the forced displacement of people and the humanitarian crisis**. According to UNHCR data on forced displacement in the country, by mid-2023 the number of refugees stood at 233,188, compared to 200,471 reported in mid-2022.<sup>93</sup> According to IOM data, 391,961 people had been internally displaced in the first quarter of the year, concentrated in the areas of Mopti (23%), Timbuktu (16%), Bandiagara (14%), Menaka (12 %), Gao (9%) and Ségou (9%).<sup>94</sup> All these data predate the resumption of hostilities in northern Mali, so by the end of the year the final figures are predicted to be much higher. Furthermore, violence and instability caused 7.1 million

91. UNHCR, [Operational Data Portal](#), January 2024.

92. ACLED, [Dashboard](#) [Viewed on 19 February 2024].

93. UNHCR, ["Refugee data Finger"](#) [Viewed on 20 February 2024].

94. IOM, ["Mali Crisis Response Plan 2023 – 2024"](#) [Viewed on 20 February 2024].

people (32% of the population) to need humanitarian assistance and protection, mainly in northern and central Mali. In 2023, OCHA data showed that only around 30% of the 750 million USD needed to meet the Malian population's needs had been collected.<sup>95</sup>

**Stability deteriorated the most in northern Mali.** There, strain between the transitional authorities and the Arab and Tuareg armed movements began when the military junta came to power following the coup d'état in May 2021 and intensified in late 2022 with the CSP's announcement that it would cease its involvement in the implementation of the Algiers agreement because the military junta was blocking it. On 1 February 2023, the CSP coalition met with the peace agreement's Algerian-led international mediation mechanism and warned that it would take action if the Malian government continued to block the implementation of the peace agreement. In March, tensions increased due to the mobilisation of around 400 vehicles belonging to armed groups that had signed the agreement near the city of Anefis, in the Kidal region. The CSP claimed that the vehicles were used for operations against ISGS. Algeria mediated a detente between the parties, causing the Malian Minister of National Reconciliation to meet with representatives of CMA and Platform in Kidal on 12 May, repeating the government's commitment to the agreement. However, President Goïta's reshuffling of his cabinet on 1 July, which stripped away two of the four ministries that the peace agreement assigned to the groups that had signed it, and Bamako's announcement that it was revoking consent and closing the UN peacekeeping mission in the country (MINUSMA), led to the first armed clashes since the peace agreement was signed in 2015. These broke out in northern areas around Timbuktu, Kidal and Gao in early August between CMA and the Malian Army, which was aided by members of the Wagner Group. Later, on 11 September, CMA said that it considered itself "at war" with Bamako. The withdrawal of MINUSMA prompted clashes between the parties for control of the bases that the UN mission had been using. The most notable fighting was for control of the city of Anefis (Kidal) and the MINUSMA bases in Ber (Timbuktu), Aguelhok, Tessalit and Kidal (Kidal). In November, the Malian Army declared that it had captured the strategic city of Kidal, the base of the CSP, which complained that the Malian Army's presence in the region was a violation of the peace agreement that granted them control over it. The CSP responded by

*The war in northern Mali resumed, pitting the government against Arab and Tuareg armed groups that had signed the 2015 Algiers peace agreement, organised under the Permanent Strategic Framework coalition*

cutting off the roads leading to the major northern cities of Menaka, Kidal, Gao, Timbuktu and Taoudeni in an effort to increase pressure on government forces. The jihadist coalition GSIM also reestablished the blockade on Timbuktu that it had lifted in November. At the end of the year, MINUSMA completed the withdrawal of its troops with the handover of the Sévaré base (Mopti region) and the camp in Timbuktu. The outbreak of violence caused division within the CSP. In late September, the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA) announced that it was pulling out of the coalition due to the bellicose stance of CMA, claiming that the conflict only benefited the jihadists. Other CSP members also expressed their commitment to peace.

**In the central region** (Mopti and Ségou), the dynamics of violence went unchanged during the year. In May, the UN published a report on the Moura (Mopti) massacre that occurred in March 2022, concluding that the Malian Army and unspecified "foreign elements" killed about 500 civilians, noting that they could constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity. On 6 September, the GSIM announced that it had killed a dozen members of the Wagner Group in an ambush near the town of Pogo, in the Ségou region.

For one more year, the security crisis went hand in hand with the **deterioration of diplomatic relations between Mali's military junta and its former Western allies**. These disagreements, which have had an impact on the international security complex for years and resulted in the termination of the French-led anti-terrorist Operation Barkhane and of Europe's Takouba Task Force in the country in 2022, for example, ended in the withdrawal of MINUSMA in 2023 after operating there for 10 years, making it the UN mission with the second-most reported deaths (311), closely behind UNFIL (333).<sup>96</sup> The disagreements also led to stronger alliances between the Malian military junta and new actors. In February, the junta became closer with Russia, receiving a visit from Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, and with neighbouring countries led by military juntas (Burkina Faso and Niger). Bamako also signed different bilateral cooperation agreements with Moscow on security matters. On 16 September, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger created the Alliance of Sahel States (AoSS) and on 1 December they announced plans to form a confederation of three states and establish a stabilisation fund, an investment bank and, finally, a common currency.

95. OCHA, "Mali" [Viewed on 20 February 2024].

96. United Nations Peacekeeping, "Fatalities" [Viewed on 11 March 2024].

Western Sahel Region	
<b>Start:</b>	2018
<b>Type:</b>	System, Resources, Identity International
<b>Main parties:</b>	Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Togo, Benin, Ivory Coast, G5-Sahel Joint Force (Mauritania, Chad, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso), Joint Task Force for the Liptako-Gourma Region (Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso), MINUSMA, France (Operation Barkhane), USA, Takouba Task Force (Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Mali, Netherlands, Niger, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and United Kingdom), Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM or GSIM), Islamic State in the Province of West Africa (ISWAP) - also known as Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Katiba Macina, Ansaroul Islam, other jihadist groups and community militias, Russia, Wagner Group
<b>Intensity:</b>	3
<b>Trend:</b>	↑

#### Summary:

The Western Sahel region (northern Mali, northern Burkina Faso and northwestern Niger) is affected by a situation of growing instability caused by several different factors, including but not limited to cross-border criminal networks in the Sahel and the marginalisation and underdevelopment of nomadic Tuareg communities in the region. This marginalisation is rooted in the Tuareg rebellions that took place in the 1960s, in the 1990s and, more recently, between 2007 and 2009, when there were rebellions against the respective governments of Niger and Mali that sought to attain greater autonomy in both countries and reverse the poverty and underdevelopment of the region. In Mali, there was a resurgence of these demands in 2012, prompted by the fall of the Gaddafi regime in Libya in 2011. Meanwhile, the armed groups of Mali have expanded their activities to the Liptako-Gourma region. This expansion is related to the instability stemming from the spread of the jihadist insurgency of Algerian origin AQIM, its fragmentation and configuration into other similar types of armed groups, some aligned with al-Qaeda and others with ISIS, which currently operate and have expanded throughout the region. This expansion has contributed to further destabilisation in the area and to the creation of different regional and international cross-border military initiatives to try to control the situation, which have also helped to internationalise it. There are also links of the conflict affecting the Lake Chad region as a consequence of the expansion of Boko Haram's activity as a result of the cross-border military intervention.

**The insecurity in the triple border region between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger remained critical, with episodes of violence continuing to take place amid the persistent crisis of governance in the region after the coup d'état in Niger in July 2023.** According to data gathered by

ACLED, a new uptick in violence was reported in the Liptako-Gourma triple border region during the year, which includes Mali, Burkina Faso and southwestern Niger's Tillabéri, Dosso and Tahoua regions, with 3,504 violent events (battles, violence against civilians and attacks with improvised explosive devices) that killed 13,634 people (compared to the 9,702 reported in 2022 and the 5,279 in 2021).<sup>97</sup> Even though Burkina Faso and Mali had a very similar number of violent events (1,699 and 1,544, respectively), the events in Burkina Faso were much deadlier (8,486 deaths compared to the 4,288 reported in Mali), accounting for 62% of all deaths caused by the conflict in the region. This is twice the number of people killed by violence in the country during the previous year (4,214), which had also doubled the number of fatalities reported in 2021 (2,290). The violence in Mali continued to be concentrated in the northern and central regions and while there was an observable decline in deaths (4,288, compared 4,842 in 2022), instability increased due to the resumption of the war in the north in mid-August between the Malian government and the armed groups that had signed the 2015 Algiers agreement, organised under the Permanent Strategic Framework (CSP) coalition.<sup>98</sup> Finally, the number of violent events in southwestern Niger (in Tillabéri, the main region affected by the violence, as well as in Dosso and Tahoua) remained in line with that of the previous year (261, compared to the 289 in 2022), but they were deadlier, causing 860 deaths compared to the 649 in 2022, accounting for 6% of all deaths in the region.

The Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS)<sup>99</sup> reported that the **deaths caused by violence involving jihadist groups across Africa**<sup>100</sup> increased by 20%, leaping from 19,412 in 2022<sup>101</sup> to 23,322 in 2023, doubling those reported in 2021. The Western Sahel region accounted for 50% of the total (11,643 deaths). This is a 43% increase over the previous year in the Western Sahel and nearly triple the levels observed in 2020, when the first military coup took place in the region. Violence specifically targeting civilians accounted for 35% of all attacks by jihadists in the Sahel, making it the region with the highest such levels in Africa. Once again, this rise in violence was due mainly to groups linked to the coalition of the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims – Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimin (GSIM or JNIM), particularly the Macina Liberation Front (FLM) and Ansaroul Islam, while Islamic State in Greater Sahara (ISGS) continued to have a minor impact, following the trend of 2021. The GSIM coalition was responsible for 81% of all deaths reported, a 67% increase over the previous year (9,195 compared to 5,499 in 2022). In contrast, ISGS-related deaths dropped by 7% in 2023 (2,448). For the third consecutive year, Burkina Faso

97. ACLED, [Dashboard](#) [Viewed on 19 February 2024].

98. See the summary on Mali in this chapter.

99. Africa Center for Strategic Studies, [Deaths Linked to Militant Islamist Violence in Africa Continue to Spiral](#), 29 January 2024.

100. Includes the Western Sahel, Lake Chad, Somalia, North Africa and Mozambique – Cabo Delgado.

101. Africa Center for Strategic Studies, [Fatalities from Militant Islamist Violence in Africa Surge by Nearly 50 Percent](#), 6 February 2023.

experienced the most violence in the region, suffering 67% of all deaths related to jihadist groups in the Sahel (7,762), over double the number of deaths reported in 2022. Niger experienced a 48% leap in deaths involving these groups (793). This figure includes the violence perpetrated by Boko Haram in the Diffa region of Niger, which is part of the conflict affecting the Lake Chad region,<sup>102</sup> most of which occurred after the coup d'état that took place in mid-2023. An increase in violence by jihadist groups was also reported in Benin during the year, doubling the number of violent events and deaths in the country, while the numbers in Togo held firm with 14 events and 69 deaths.

The surge in violence was mirrored by the **forced displacement of people in the region**. UNHCR estimated at mid-year that there were over 330,000 refugees and 2.5 million internally displaced people in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Burkina Faso continued to host most of the displaced population, with over 2 million internally displaced people, while lower figures were reported in Mali (375,000) and Niger (335,000), including the entire country.<sup>103</sup>

The security crisis continued to go hand in hand with **diplomatic tensions and the renewal of the systems of alliances and security in the region**. There was a coup in Niger in July that ousted President Mohamed Bazoum, the last Western ally in the region. The coup consolidated the military juntas across the Sahel after the coups in Mali and Burkina Faso. The military juntas' hold on power continued to strain relations with their West African neighbours, as well as with Western powers. Disagreements between the military juntas and their former Western allies, which have had an impact on the international security complex in the region for years, and primarily in Mali, resulted in the termination and withdrawal of the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in 2023. Niger also ended its defence and security cooperation agreements with the EU and with France, which withdrew its last soldiers on 22 December. Meanwhile, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger strengthened their alliances with Russia and made progress in forging a regional alliance. On 16 September, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger created the Alliance of Sahel States (AoSS) and on 1 December they announced plans to form a three-state confederation and establish a stabilisation fund, an investment bank and, finally, a common currency. On 2 December, Burkina Faso and Niger said that they were pulling out of the anti-jihadist G5 Sahel alliance, following in the footsteps of Mali, which had done the same in 2022.

*Following the coup d'état in Niger in July 2023, all the countries sharing the Liptako-Gourma triple border region (Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso) were governed by military juntas*

### 1.3.2 America

Colombia	
<b>Start:</b>	1964
<b>Type:</b>	System Internationalised internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Government, ELN, Estado Mayor Central (EMC), Segunda Marquetalia, narco-paramilitary groups
<b>Intensity:</b>	2
<b>Trend:</b>	=

**Summary:**

In 1964, in the context of an agreement for the alternation of power between the Liberal party and the Conservative party (National Front), which excluded other political options, two armed opposition movements emerged with the goal of taking power: the ELN (made up of university students and workers, inspired by Guevara) and the FARC (a communist-oriented organisation that advocates agrarian reform). In the 1970s, various groups were created, such as the M-19 and the EPL, which ended up negotiating with the government and pushing through a new Constitution (1991) that established the foundations of a welfare state. At the end of the 1980s, several paramilitary groups emerged, instigated by sectors of the armed forces, landowners, drug traffickers and traditional politicians, aimed at defending the status quo through a strategy of terror. Drug trafficking activity influenced the economic, political and social spheres and contributed to the increase in violence. In 2016, the signing of a peace agreement with the FARC led to its demobilisation and transformation into a political party.

**Violence in Colombia remained at high levels throughout the year despite the different ceasefire agreements that the government reached with several active armed groups and the open negotiations with the ELN and EMC.**<sup>104</sup>

According to data collected from the research centre ACLED, 1,934 people lost their lives as a consequence of all the violent events that took place in the country in 2023. Many of the deaths were caused by armed attacks committed by unidentified individuals against civilians, though they could not be attributed to any of the different armed opposition groups active in the country, while other attacks were carried out by paramilitary groups and armed groups involved in drug trafficking.

The CELAC research centre indicated that 84 people died as a result of armed attacks attributed to the armed group ELN. The Indepaz organisation noted that 93 massacres were reported in which 300 people were killed in 2023, the same number of victims as the previous year. OCHA reported that there were less clashes between armed opposition groups and the Colombian Armed Forces during the year, but the

102. See the summary on the Lake Chad region (Boko Haram) in this chapter.

103. UNHCR, *Mid-Year Trends 2023*, 25 October 2023.

104. See the summaries on the peace negotiations with the ELN and EMC in chapter 3 (Peace negotiations in America) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.



levels of confrontation between the different active armed groups were similar to those during the previous year. OCHA also warned of the serious humanitarian consequences that the use of antipersonnel mines had on the conflict, which caused 95 fatalities, expressed concern about the confinement and reduced mobility of 88,000 people due to the activity of armed groups and the impact of the forced displacement of 63,200 people and reported an increase in the recruitment and use of 251 girls and boys by armed groups, 93% more than in 2022. Both the confinements and forced population displacements had a disproportionate (and the greatest) impact on indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) indicated that 320 victims of massacres were reported during 2023. The OHCHR blamed the massacres on non-state armed groups and criminal organisations and said they mainly affected the departments of Antioquia, Atlántico, Cauca, Magdalena, Nariño and Valle del Cauca. According to the report of the Ombudsman's Office, 181 social leaders and human rights activists (160 men and 21 women) were murdered during 2023. The humanitarian situation caused by the armed conflict was aggravated by the effects of climate change in the country, with droughts and floods in different areas.

The year began with an increase in clashes between the ELN and the Colombian security forces, despite the peace process under way, as well as hostilities between the ELN and Estado Mayor Central (EMC), a FARC dissident group that splintered off from the main group, especially in the department of Arauca. These latest clashes caused the death of 10 people in January, and were repeated throughout the year, causing dozens of fatalities and having serious impacts on the civilian population. In fact, although both groups were holding peace negotiations with Bogota separately, the government's negotiating delegations said that an understanding had to be reached between both groups that could lead to less violence. The ELN's most serious attack against the Colombian Armed Forces in a year and a half took place in March. A Colombian Army vehicle was attacked in North Santander, killing 10 soldiers and wounding nine. Armed clashes were also reported between different FARC dissident groups, the EMC and the Segunda Marquetalia. In the following months, fighting continued between the ELN and the security forces. However, as part of the peace negotiations, the government and the ELN signed a ceasefire agreement that was planned to start on 3 August. After it was signed, there was a significant decrease in violence. Still, clashes between different armed opposition groups and criminal organisations continued. In fact, after the ceasefire agreement between the ELN and the government was signed, clashes between the ELN and EMC intensified, leaving more than a dozen people dead in September. In October, the Colombian government and EMC signed a bilateral ceasefire agreement.

### 1.3.3. Asia and the Pacific

#### South Asia

Afghanistan	
<b>Start:</b>	2001
<b>Type:</b>	System Internationalised internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Government, National Resistance Front of Afghanistan (NRF), ISIS-KP, Afghanistan Freedom Front (AFF)
<b>Intensity:</b>	2
<b>Trend:</b>	↓

#### Summary:

The country has lived with almost uninterrupted armed conflict since the invasion by Soviet troops in 1979, beginning a civil war between the armed forces (with Soviet support) and anti-Communist, Islamist guerrillas (Mujahideen). The withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1989 and the rise of the Mujahideen to power in 1992 in a context of chaos and internal confrontations between the different anti-Communist factions led to the emergence of the Taliban movement, which, at the end of the nineties, controlled almost all Afghan territory. In November 2001, after the Al-Qaeda attacks of 11 September, and the refusal of the Taliban government to hand over Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders (on Afghan territory) the US attacked the country aided by a contingent of British forces. After the signing of the Bonn agreements, an interim government was established, led by Hamid Karzai and subsequently ratified at the polls. Since 2006 there has been an escalation of violence, motivated by the rebuilding of the Taliban militias. Following the 2014 presidential and provincial elections, the country was plunged into a crisis sparked by allegations of electoral fraud after the second round in which the two most voted leaders, Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, kept the results in the air for months. In September, an agreement was reached to create a two-headed government with Ghani as president and Abdullah as chief executive. In 2011, the international troops began their withdrawal, which was completed at the end of 2014, although the mission "Resolute Support" was deployed on the ground, with a NATO mandate to train Afghan forces and another force to carry out training and counterterrorism operations, made up of US soldiers, "Freedom Sentinel" mission. In 2021, after a significant escalation of violence, the Taliban rose to power again and all international troops were withdrawn from the country.

#### Violence continued in Afghanistan, but it declined observably throughout the year.

According to the research centre ACLED, 998 deaths were reported as a result of armed violence during 2023, considerably fewer than the 3,970 in 2022 and far below the 42,000 in 2021. A significant portion of the civilian deaths resulted from repression by the Taliban security forces against people actively involved in the previous administration or who had direct contact with international organisations or international security forces deployed in the country after the US invasion of 2001, as well as human rights and women's rights activists. Most of the attacks that took place during the year were carried out by the

regional affiliate of ISIS, ISIS-KP, which targeted the Afghan security forces and members of the government, though its activity slowed down throughout the year. The International Crisis Group noted that improvements in the Taliban government's counterinsurgency capacities reduced the number of attacks by ISIS-KP and the number of related deaths.<sup>105</sup> Although the United Nations stated during the first half of the year that ISIS-KP was the greatest terrorist threat in Afghanistan and the South Asian region, adding that its operational capacity called the Taliban regime's ability to maintain security in the country into question,<sup>106</sup> fewer attacks by ISIS-KP were noticed in early 2024, followed by an increase in the Taliban government's counterinsurgency operations in the second half of the year.<sup>107</sup> In fact, the Taliban security forces conducted several different security operations in which they detained and killed dozens of ISIS-KP members.

ISIS-KP's attacks during the year included a suicide attack that took place in Kabul in January against a convoy of the Minister of Defence that killed 20 members of the security forces and civilians. Days later, another 20 people died in a suicide attack near the Ministry of Foreign Affairs while a Chinese delegation was visiting. In March, ISIS-KP killed the governor of Balkh province. The Taliban government claimed to have killed ISIS-KP's second-in-command, as well as the head of intelligence and operations, responsible for the major attacks that took place in Kabul early in the year. Sporadic clashes and armed attacks by different groups opposed to the Taliban regime such as the NRF and the AFF were also reported, though to a lesser extent than in previous years, especially in the case of the NRF. The UN Secretary-General's December report stated that these groups had carried out fewer attacks than in other periods, that their activities did not pose any security threat to the Taliban authorities and that there had been fewer gunfights than in previous periods.<sup>108</sup> Alongside the armed violence, Afghanistan continued to be affected by a major humanitarian crisis aggravated by the effects of climate change. According to different studies, Afghanistan is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to the consequences of the climate crisis owing to the impact of droughts and the local authorities' inability to respond. Meanwhile, women and girls continued to suffer serious human rights violations due to extremely discriminatory legislation and practices imposed by the Taliban government.

India (CPI-M)	
<b>Start:</b>	1967
<b>Type:</b>	System Internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Government, CPI-M (naxalites)
<b>Intensity:</b>	1
<b>Trend:</b>	=

**Summary:**

The armed conflict in which the Indian government confronts the armed Maoist group the CPI-M (known as the Naxalites, in honour of the town where the movement was created) affects many states in India. The CPI-M emerged in West Bengal at the end of the sixties with demands relating to the eradication of the land ownership system, as well as strong criticism of the system of parliamentary democracy, which is considered as a colonial legacy. Since then, armed activity has been constant and it has been accompanied by the establishment of parallel systems of government in the areas under its control, which are basically rural ones. Military operations against this group, considered by the Indian government as terrorists, have been constant. In 2004, a negotiation process began which ended in failure. In the following years there was an escalation of violence that led the government to label the conflict as the main threat to national security. Since 2011 there has been a significant reduction in hostilities.

**The armed conflict between the Indian security forces and the Naxalite insurgency continued, affecting several states in India, though it remained less intense than it had been in the past.**

According to death tolls compiled by the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), 150 people died due to the violence of the armed conflict in 2023. This figure was similar to that of 2022, when 135 people lost their lives. Most of those who died because of the armed conflict (61) were civilians, according to data collected by the SATP, surpassing the number of security force members (31) and insurgents (58). Again, the state most affected by violence was Chhattisgarh, where 88 people died as a result of the conflict, over half the total. The states of Jharkand, Odisha, Maharashtra and others were also affected. Official data also confirmed the drop in violence and associated deaths that had occurred in previous years. Indian Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai noted that the number of violent incidents had fallen by 36% between 2018 to 2022 and that there were 59% fewer fatalities among members of the security forces and civilians over the same period. The number of states affected by armed violence also decreased. However, sporadic clashes, attacks and security force operations continued and human rights organisations also complained about violations civilians' rights in the context of the armed

105. International Crisis Group, *The Taliban's Neighbourhood: Regional Diplomacy with Afghanistan*, Report No. 337, 30 January 2024.

106. UN Secretary-General, *Seventeenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat* (S/2023/568), 12 August 2023.

107. UN Secretary-General, *Eighteenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat* (S/2024/117), 31 January 2024.

108. UN Secretary-General *The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security Report of the Secretary-General*, (A/78/628-S/2023/94), 11 December 2023.

conflict. The most serious episode of violence took place in April, in Dantewada, one of the districts of the state of Chhattisgarh most affected by violence. The detonation of an explosive device on a road when security forces vehicle passed by killed 10 police officers and a civilian participating in an operation against the Naxalite insurgency. It was the most serious attack in the state in recent years. Some incidents of violence also occurred during the state assembly election period, especially in the state of Chhattisgarh.

India (Jammu and Kashmir)	
<b>Start:</b>	1989
<b>Type:</b>	Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Governments, Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, Jaish-e-Muhammad, United Jihad Council, Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), The Resistance Front (TRF)
<b>Intensity:</b>	1
<b>Trend:</b>	↓

#### Summary:

The armed conflict in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir has its origin in the dispute over the region of Kashmir which, since the independence and division of India and Pakistan, has confronted both states. On three occasions (1947 to 1948; 1965 and 1971) these countries had suffered from armed conflicts, with both of them claiming sovereignty over the region, divided between India, Pakistan and China. The armed conflict between India and Pakistan in 1947 gave rise to the current division and creation of a de facto border between both countries. Since 1989, the armed conflict has been moved to the interior of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, where a whole host of rebel groups, in favour of the complete independence of the state or unconditional adhesion to Pakistan, confront the Indian security forces. Since the beginning of the peace process between India and Pakistan in 2004, there has been a considerable reduction in the violence, although the armed groups remain active.

decrease in violence has been constant and the security forces have gained almost total control over the armed groups. Though in the first few months of the year there were hardly any clashes as a result of the winter weather conditions in the region, especially in the mountainous areas, armed incursions by insurgent groups and security force operations were repeated in the second half of the year. In fact, in February it was reported to the media that the government was studying the withdrawal of the Indian Armed Forces deployed in Jammu and Kashmir (approximately 130,000 soldiers), keeping only those deployed along the Line of Control, the de facto border with Pakistan (around 80,000 soldiers). The withdrawn military forces would be replaced by the Central Reserve Police Force, which specialises in counterinsurgency. However, this possibility was ruled out in May, given the rise in armed group activity. The deadliest attack in the region since 2021 had taken place in April. Five soldiers died in an attack on a military truck in the Rajouri sector. In the following months, insurgent groups attacked military and police targets multiple times. In addition, security forces intercepted armed groups' attempts to infiltrate from Pakistan, especially in the Kupwara district. Clashes near the Line of Control between security forces and members of the People's Anti-Fascist Front left six Indian soldiers dead in May and five insurgents were killed in clashes with security forces while trying to infiltrate Kupwara district in June. In December, after an attack on two Indian Army vehicles that killed five soldiers and wounded two others, a security force operation began in which eight civilians were arrested. Three of them died the day after their arrest, leading to allegations of torture and mistreatment by family members. The most active armed groups were Lashkar-e-Tayyba, its affiliate Resistance Front and Hizbul Mujahideen. Dozens of members of these groups were detained in security force operations throughout the year. Meanwhile, the Indian Supreme Court upheld the Indian government's decision to withdraw statehood status from Jammu and Kashmir.

**Violence in the armed conflict in Jammu and Kashmir fell significantly with a drop in the death toll associated with the violence.** According to data collected by the South Asia Terrorism Portal, 134 people died in 2023 as a result of armed clashes between Indian security forces and Kashmiri insurgent groups operating in the region. Eighty-seven were insurgents, 12 were civilians, 33 were members of the security forces and two were unspecified. This is in line with the decrease in the number of deaths since 2020, when 321 fatalities were reported, a figure that has fallen each year since then. The research centre ACLED reported similar figures and indicated that there were 155 deaths as a result of armed violence in the same period. Clashes did continue throughout the year, despite the Indian government's rhetoric that the conflict was practically over, saying that since it suspended Jammu and Kashmir's statehood, the

Pakistan	
<b>Start:</b>	2001
<b>Type:</b>	System Internationalised internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Government, Armed Forces, intelligence services, Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), ISIS-KP
<b>Intensity:</b>	3
<b>Trend:</b>	↑

#### Summary:

The armed conflict affecting the country is a result of the intervention in Afghanistan in 2001. Initially, the conflict played out in the area including the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province (formerly called the North-West Frontier Province). After the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan, members of its

Government and militias, as well as several insurgent groups of different nationalities, including Al-Qaeda, found refuge in Pakistan, mainly in several tribal agencies, although the leadership was spread out over several towns (Quetta, Lahore or Karachi). While Pakistan initially collaborated with the US in the search for foreign insurgents (Chechens, Uzbeks) and members of al-Qaeda, it did not offer the same cooperation when it came to the Taliban leadership. The dissatisfaction of various groups of Pakistani origin who were part of the Taliban insurgency led to the creation in December 2007 of the Pakistani Taliban movement (Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, TTP), which began to commit attacks in the rest of Pakistan against both state institutions and civilians. With violence rising to previously unknown levels, and after a series of attacks that specifically targeted the Shiite, Ahmadiyya and Christian minorities, and to a lesser extent Sufis and Barelvis, public opinion turned in favour of eliminating the terrorist sanctuaries. In June 2014 the Army launched operation Zarb-e Azb to eradicate insurgents from the agencies of North and South Waziristan. Following the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in 2021, the armed conflict in Pakistan intensified.

**The armed conflict between Pakistani security forces and the Pakistani Taliban TTP insurgency intensified during the year after November 2022, when the TTP ended the ceasefire agreement they had reached a few months earlier.**

Violence persisted amid an intense political crisis since the dismissal of Prime Minister Imran Khan in 2022. Clashes, attacks and security force operations took place throughout the year, which were mainly concentrated in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the most affected by violence in the entire country. Thus, the trend of increasing violence was confirmed and aggravated in Pakistan since the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan. The Center for Research and Security Studies in Pakistan noted that 2023 was the year when the most security force members were reportedly killed in the previous decade and also pointed to an increase in suicide attacks. It also reported that a total of 1,524 people had died as a result of violence in the country as a whole, compared to 980 in 2022. The total body count linked to the armed conflict in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province was 979, while the previous year it had been 633. Meanwhile, ACLED reported 2,125 total deaths in 2023, of which 1,262 were in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Taliban insurgency did not limit its activity to this province and episodes of violence by the TTP were also reported in other parts of the country, such as in Karachi, the capital of the province of Sindh. The Pakistani government's accusations that the Taliban authorities in Afghanistan were supporting the Pakistani Taliban armed group TTP, together with the intensification of the repatriation of tens of thousands of Afghan refugees and migrants residing in Pakistan, led to an increase in tension between both countries.

The year began with an attack on a mosque in Peshawar, the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, that caused the death of more than 84 people, making it one of the most serious attacks of 2023. Since the mosque was inside a

police facility, most of those killed were police officers. The attack was blamed on a local faction of the armed group TTP. In the weeks before and after, there were many episodes of violence in which dozens of insurgents, police and soldiers died. According to the analysis of the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies, the TTP was the most active armed group in the country during the year, responsible for most attacks against Pakistani security forces. In April, the government announced a national operation aimed at putting an end to attacks by armed groups, as announced by the National Security Committee. However, the armed actions of the TTP and other groups operating in the country continued in the following weeks. In August, a suicide attack on a military convoy killed nine soldiers in Bannu district, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. There was also another extremely serious attack in December, a suicide bombing against military installations in the Dera Ismail Khan district that killed 23 soldiers and wounded over 30.

### *The armed conflict between the Pakistani security forces and the Taliban armed group TTP intensified*

Attacks were also launched by KP, the ISIS affiliate operating in the region. One of the most serious occurred on 31 July, when a suicide bomb during a political event of the Islamist party Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl in the Bajaur district, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, killed over 63 people and wounded more than 100. In September, an attack during a religious event in Mastung district in the province of Balochistan killed 55 people.

Pakistan (Balochistan)	
<b>Start:</b>	2005
<b>Type:</b>	Self-government, Identity, Resources Internationalised internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Government, BLA, BNA, BLF and BLT; LeJ, TTP, ISIS-KP
<b>Intensity:</b>	2
<b>Trend:</b>	↑

#### **Summary:**

Since the creation of the state of Pakistan in 1947, Balochistan, the richest province in terms of natural resources, but with some of the highest levels of poverty in the country, has suffered from four periods of armed violence (1948, 1958, 1963-69 and 1973-77) in which the rebel forces stated their objective of obtaining greater autonomy and even independence. In 2005, the armed rebel forces reappeared on the scene, basically attacking infrastructures linked to the extraction of gas. The opposition armed group, BLA, became the main opposing force to the presence of the central government, which it accused of making the most of the wealth of the province without giving any of it back to the local population. As a result of the resurgence of the armed opposition, a military operation was started in 2005 in the province, causing displacement of the civilian population and armed confrontation. In parallel, a movement of the civilian population calls clarifying the disappearance of hundreds, if not thousands, of Baluchi at the hands of the security forces of the State.



**The armed conflict in the Pakistani province of Balochistan intensified throughout the year and both the amount of violent events and the number of people killed as a result of the violence there increased. Balochistan was the second most affected province by violence in Pakistan during 2023,** according to data collected by the Pakistani Center for Research and Security Studies. According to this organisation, 399 people died in 2023 as a result of armed clashes between the insurgent groups and the security forces, attacks that occurred throughout the year and security force operations. Thus, the increasing violence that had already been observed in the previous year was consolidated, influenced by the regional context after the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan and growing opposition to foreign investment in the province, especially from China. The research centre ACLED estimated that 659 people died as a result of armed violence in the province, slightly fewer than those in 2022. Alongside the activity of the Balochi nationalist insurgent groups, there were also armed actions by Taliban groups and ISIS-KP, responsible for an attack during a religious event in Mastung district in which 55 people died in September. The most active Balochi armed group in the conflict was the BLA, as was the case in previous years, which carried out different armed attacks against the Pakistani security forces. The most serious attacks include the explosion of a bomb that killed four police officers and wounded nine other people in the city of Quetta in March. Hours before, a police car had also been attacked in Quetta. There was a third attack against a police patrol in Quetta a few hours later, though no victims were reported in either of these two other attacks. The most serious attack of the year occurred in Gwadar district in November, when 14 soldiers died in an ambush against two security force vehicles. The armed group BLA was blamed for the attack. This district was rocked by different episodes of violence throughout the year. Alongside the attacks and armed clashes, civil society organisations continued to complain about serious human rights violations linked to the armed conflict, such as forced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and false positives (the violent deaths of civilians presented as the violent deaths of insurgents).

## South-east Asia and Oceania

Philippines (Mindanao)	
<b>Start:</b>	1991
<b>Type:</b>	Self-government, Identity, System Internationalised internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Government, Abu Sayyaf, BIFF, Islamic State of Lanao/Dawlah Islamiyah/ Maute Group, Ansar Khilafah, Toraife Group, MILF and MNLF factions
<b>Intensity:</b>	1
<b>Trend:</b>	↓
<b>Summary:</b>	
The current situation of violence in Mindanao, where several armed groups are confronting the Government and,	

occasionally each other, is closely linked to the long-lasting armed conflict between Manila and the MNFL, and later the MILF, two organizations fighting for the self-determination of the Moro people. The failure to implement the 1996 peace agreement with the MNLF meant that some factions of this group have not fully demobilized and sporadically take part in episodes of violence, while the difficulties that emerged during the negotiation process between the MILF and the Government encouraged the creation of the BIFF, a faction of the group that opposes this process and was created in 2010 by the former commander of the MILF, Ameril Umbra Kato. On another front, since the 90s, the group Abu Sayyaf has been fighting to create an independent Islamic state in the Sulu archipelago and the western regions of Mindanao (south). Initially this group recruited disaffected members of other armed groups like the MILF or the MNLF, but then moved away ideologically from both organizations and resorted more and more systematically to kidnappings, extortion and bomb attacks, which lead the group to be included on the USA and EU lists of terrorist organizations. Finally, it is important to note that the emergence of ISIS on the international scene led to the emergence of many groups in Mindanao that swore allegiance and obedience to ISIS. In 2016, this group claimed authorship for the first large attack in Mindanao and announced its intentions to strengthen its structure and increase its attacks in the region.

The Philippine government declared that **many of the armed organisations operating in various parts of Mindanao had clearly become weaker in 2023, but they continued to fight with the state security forces. Episodes of violence between the different groups and attacks against civilians were also reported throughout the year.** Although there were no official figures on fatalities associated with the armed conflict, the research centre ACLED noted that 230 people lost their lives in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), 63 in Central Mindanao (which includes the provinces of Cotabato, South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani and General Santos) and 29 in the Zamboanga region, which includes the Sulu archipelago (one of the areas historically most affected by violence). In late July, **the head of the Philippine Armed Forces declared that the number of Islamist fighters had fallen drastically since 2017 and said that he was optimistic about the possibility of having militarily defeated the armed groups linked to Islamic State.** Specifically, he said that in the previous two years no kidnapping had been reported, the number of foreign fighters had fallen (which some military intelligence sources even put at between 100 and 200 in 2023) and the number of combatants who had surrendered or accepted disarmament and demobilisation had increased exponentially. In Central Mindanao alone, 914 members of Dawlah Islamiyah, the BIFF and the NPA surrendered in 2023. Along the same lines, in late July, President Ferdinand Marcos lifted the state of emergency that had been proclaimed by previous President Rodrigo Duterte in September 2016 to address the high levels of violence in the region. Subsequently, in May 2017, the government had proclaimed martial law in Mindanao to confront a months-long siege conducted by several Islamist armed groups in the city of Marawi, some of

whose neighbourhoods were completely destroyed. Martial law was lifted in December 2019, after the government had neutralised several of these groups. The Marcos administration lifted the state of emergency, claiming that state security force operations had helped to restore peace and order in the parts of Mindanao most affected by the conflict.

One of the armed groups active in Mindanao in recent decades that was **affected the most by counterinsurgency operations during 2023 was Abu Sayyaf. In fact, in September, the governor of Sulu province (one of the group's main strongholds) declared the province free of Abu Sayyaf's members and influence.** The governor's claim was supported by the Sulu Provincial Task Force to End Local Armed Conflict (PTF-ELAC) and by the Philippine Armed Forces in the region, which indicated that 966 Abu Sayyaf fighters had voluntarily surrendered (handing over 559 firearms) and that 52 municipalities affected by the group's activity had been "liberated". The group's main leaders also died during the year. In early December, Mudzrimar Sawadjaan, also known as Mundi, died in a gunfight in the area around the municipality of Tipo-Tipo, in Basilan province. Sawadjaan was the leader of one of the Abu Sayyaf factions operating in Sulu province and the government considered him the person who introduced the use of suicide attacks. He had been blamed for orchestrating some of the group's deadliest attacks in recent years, such as the bomb attack on the Jolo cathedral in 2019 that killed 23 people and wounded several hundred and two bomb attacks in central Jolo in 2020 in which 14 people died and more than 70 were wounded. According to military sources, Sawadjaan had been protected by BIFF fighters in Maguindanao province in recent months. Previously, in late May, the Philippine Armed Forces declared that Radullan Sahiron had died. He was one of the group's founders and the oldest active Abu Sayyaf leader at the time of his death. In fact, Sahiron assumed leadership of the group in 2006, after the death of Gaddafi Janjalani, who in turn had succeeded his brother and founder of the group, Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani. Sahiron, who was one of the most wanted people by the US government since the early 1990s, led one of the Abu Sayyaf factions that had not sworn allegiance to Islamic State, as other armed groups in the region had done. The Philippine Armed Forces acknowledged that they did not have Sahiron's body, though they stated with 90% confidence that he had died in the southern city of Patikul. Finally, Nurudin Muddalan died in a firefight with the Philippine Armed Forces in Ungkaya Pukan, Basilan province, in mid-June. Muddalan became the leader of one of the Abu Sayyaf factions in Basilan following the death of the group's historical leader Furuji Indama in 2020. He had participated in some major episodes of violence, such as an ambush in Tipo-Tipo in which 15 soldiers were killed and another 13 were wounded.

Military sources claimed during the year that the number of the BIFF's combatants could have fallen in recent years from between 300 and 400 to under 100, and that the group is currently organised into three main factions, led respectively by Ismael Abubakar (Imam Bongos), Ustadz Karialan (Imam Minimbang) and Esmael Abdulmalik, also known as Abu Toraife. According to some media outlets, Abu Toraife was proclaimed leader of Islamic State in the Philippines and emir of South-east Asia in August, though it was not clear whether he had obtained support from all the groups and factions that have sworn allegiance to Islamic State in recent years. Abu Toraife's rise to power came after the death of Fahirudin Hadji Satar (also known as Abu Zacharia) in an armed confrontation in Marawi (Lanao del Sur province) in mid-June. In 2019, Zacharia had succeeded Owaida Marohombsar (also known as Abu Dar), the head of the Maute Group (or Dawlah Islamiyah), as the leader and emir of Islamic State. Though the Maute Group has been one of the most active insurgent groups in Mindanao in recent years (especially in Lanao del Sur), it participated in fewer episodes of violence than in previous years. However, it did continue to threaten security in certain parts of Mindanao, according to the government. In early December, for example, Manila accused the group of carrying out an attack during a Catholic mass held at Mindanao State University in which four people died and 45 others were wounded. President Marcos said that the attack had been carried out by foreign terrorists, while the Philippine Armed Forces indicated that it could have been an act of revenge for the military operation that had killed 11 combatants in the city of Datu Hoffer Ampatuan a few days earlier. After the attack on the university, the Philippine Armed Forces carried out an air and ground offensive in the provinces of Maguindanao and Cotabato (especially in the Ligawasan area) in which at least nine combatants were killed and many others were wounded. At around the same time, the Maute Group carried out several attacks against the MILF in the Ligawasan area in which 11 MILF members died. Previously, in September, clashes had already been reported between the MILF and the Maute Group in Datu Hoffer Ampatuan. Throughout the year, there were clashes between two MILF base commands (105 and 118), displacing thousands of people and resulting in the deaths of several combatants (in December, for example, nine militants from both groups were killed in several days of fighting in the town of Mamasapano). There was also sporadic fighting between combatants from the 118th Command of the MILF and the BIFF, such as those that occurred in November in the province of Maguindanao del Sur, which displaced hundreds of people in the region. Finally, there were also some clashes between members of different MNLF factions, such as the one that in November that caused the death of two former combatants in the province of Cotabato.

Philippines (NPA)	
<b>Start:</b>	1969
<b>Type:</b>	System Internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Government, NPA
<b>Intensity:</b>	1
<b>Trend:</b>	=

#### Summary:

The NPA, the armed branch of the Communist party of the Philippines, started the armed fight in 1969 which reached its zenith during the 1980s under the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos. Although the internal purges, the democratisation of the country and the offers of amnesty weakened the support and the legitimacy of the NPA at the beginning of the 1990s, it is currently calculated that it is operational in most of the provinces in the country. After the terrorist attacks of 11th September 2001, its inclusion in the list of terrorist organisations of the USA and the EU greatly eroded confidence between the parties and, to a good degree, caused the interruption of the peace conversations with Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's government. The NPA, whose main objective is to access power and the transformation of the political system and the socio-economic model, has as its political references the Communist Party of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front (NDF), which bring together various Communist organisations. The NDF has been holding peace talks with the government since the early 1990s.

Despite the fact that the government and the NDF pledged to resume peace negotiations in November after they had been interrupted since 2017, many clashes took place between state security forces and NPA combatants throughout the year. Research centres estimated death tolls of at least 170 people, though the real number could be much higher. Clashes occurred in the three main regions of the country (in Luzon, in the north; in Visayas, in the centre; and in Mindanao, in the south), especially in Negros Occidental, Samar, the Panay Islands (Visayas), Abra, Mindoro, Quezon, Batangas and Bicol (Luzon), Caraga, Sultan Kudarat, Surigao and Bukidnon (Mindanao). The months with the greatest armed activity, leaving more than 20 fatalities, were April, May, September and December. **On 31 December, the Philippine Armed Forces declared that by 2023 they had managed to dismantle eight NPA fronts and weaken another 14, so that by early 2024 only 11 weakened NPA fronts remained (especially in Visayas and Mindanao), with an estimated strength of fewer than 1,500 combatants, the fewest since the armed group was created in 1969.** According to the Philippine Armed Forces, 1,751 firearms were seized or handed over and 1,399 members of the NPA were neutralised, including 67 important ones in 2023. In fact, in April the NPA finally acknowledged the death of Benito Tiamzon and Wilma Austria, two of the most

prominent historical leaders of the armed movement in recent decades. However, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) said that they had not died in a gunfight with the Philippine Armed Forces in Visayas in August 2022, but rather had been captured, tortured and later put on a boat that was detonated by remote control. Both leaders died four months before the death of the founder of the Communist Party and the NPA, Jose Maria Sison. After both events, the Philippine Armed Forces said that the group had been weakening at a quickening pace in recent years and that it was in its death throes and falling apart. Several government and military officials commented on the state's ability to impose itself militarily on the NPA during the year. In July, for example, **President Ferdinand Marcos declared that by the end of the year, all operational fronts of the NPA would have been dismantled, expressing his conviction that before the end of 2023, the sole province where the NPA was active (Northern Samar) would be free of Communists and their influence.** At the end of the year, a spokesperson for the Philippine Armed Forces said that over 3,400 NPA members had surrendered to the government authorities between January and September 2023 alone, adding that government programmes for demobilising and reintegrating combatants were running smoothly. Manila declared that since it set a new counterinsurgency and conflict management policy in 2018, practically all the movement's 89 fronts throughout the country at the time had been dismantled and 8,654 NPA members had been neutralised, including 314 leaders, meaning that the group's presence and influence had been eliminated in more than 4,500 municipalities.

In December, the CCP decreed a two-day ceasefire (25 and 26 December) to mark the Christmas holidays and the 55th anniversary of the party's founding. The government described the ceasefire announcement as meaningless and unnecessary and blasted a statement issued by the CCP declaring the primacy of armed struggle to achieve transformation, ordering the NPA to gather strength and increase its fight against the Philippine government and depicting the peace talks as an additional battlefield for advancing their objectives. However, the part of the CCP's statement that created the most controversy was its announcement of the Third Rectification Movement, after the first one in the 1960s, which culminated with the refoundation of the Communist Party in 1968, and the second one in the early 1990s. According to the CCP, the Third Rectification Movement aims to overcome the ideological, political and organisational mistakes, weaknesses and shortcomings that the CCP had identified in recent years (especially since 2016) that would have hindered its growth and the progress of the revolution.

Myanmar	
<b>Start:</b>	1948
<b>Type:</b>	Self-government, Identity, System Internationalised internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Government, armed groups (Ceasefire signatories: ABSDF, ALP, CNF, DKBA, KNU, KNU/KNLA-PC, PNLO, RCSS, NMSP, LDU; Non-signatories: KIA, NDAA, MNDAA, SSPP/SSA, TNLA, AA, UWSA, ARSA, KNPP), PDF
<b>Intensity:</b>	3
<b>Trend:</b>	↑
<b>Summary:</b> Since 1948, dozens of armed insurgent groups of ethnic origin have confronted the government of Myanmar, demanding recognition of their particular ethnic and cultural features and calling for reforms in the territorial structure of the State or simply for independence. Since the start of the military dictatorship in 1962, the armed forces have been fighting armed groups in the ethnic states. These groups combined demands for self-determination for minorities with calls for democratisation shared with the political opposition. In 1988, the government began a process of ceasefire agreements with some of the insurgent groups, allowing them to pursue their economic activities (basically trafficking in drugs and precious stones). However, the military operations have been constant during these decades, particularly directed against the civil population in order to do away with the armed groups' bases, leading to the displacement of thousands of people. In 2011 the Government began to approach the insurgency and since then there has been a ceasefire agreements with almost all of the armed groups. In February 2021, Myanmar's military leaders carried out a coup d'état that ended the transition to democracy in the country and led to an intensification of the armed conflict and the emergence of the People's Defence Force (PDF), an umbrella organisation that brings together dozens of armed groups opposed to the military regime, while clashes with ethnic insurgencies persisted.	

**The armed conflict in Myanmar remained at high levels of violence throughout the year and there was a serious escalation of violence in October.** Fighting continued throughout the year between the Burmese security forces and the different active ethnic armed groups, as well as the People's Defence Force (PDF), which emerged after the 2021 military coup d'état. According to figures compiled by the research centre ACLED, 15,625 people died in 2023 as a result of the armed conflict in the country, fewer than the 19,324 in 2022. ACLED also reported that there was a considerable rise in the number of clashes during the second half of the year. The United Nations Office of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) indicated that one third of Myanmar's population (18.6 million people, of which 6 million were children and 52% were women and girls) required humanitarian aid. This was one million more than in

***The armed conflict in Myanmar seriously escalated in October, with several armed groups working together in the largest offensive against the Burmese Armed Forces since the 2021 coup d'état***

2022 and 19 times the number of people who required such aid before the military coup in 2021. In addition, almost two million people were internally displaced, according to figures from UNHCR, half a million more than in the previous year. The humanitarian crisis resulting from the armed conflict was also made worse by the effects of climate change in one of the countries in the world with the highest risk of suffering extreme climate events, according to data from previous years.<sup>109</sup>

Since the start of the year, the Philippine Armed Forces launched air strikes in various states that killed hundreds and forcibly displaced thousands. However, **the armed conflict reached a turning point in October, when the groups composing the Three Brotherhood Alliance (the Kokang armed group MNDAA, the Ta'ang armed group TNLA and the Arakan armed group AA) launched Operation 1027 (in reference to its start on 27 October) in northern Shan State.** The operation was the largest offensive against the Burmese security forces after the 2021 coup d'état. The insurgent groups captured several cities and interrupted circulation along different routes connecting the country with China, making a significant commercial impact. The initial objective of this armed offensive, led by the MNDAA, was to regain control of the Kokang Self-Administered Zone, which the armed group had held until 2009. This is a crucial area for the illegal gambling business and many illicit activities linked to Internet scams controlled by criminal groups. Thousands of members of armed groups participated in the operation, with the support of several groups linked to the PDF. The attacks were carried out simultaneously in several parts of the state, without the security forces being able to respond to them adequately. Although the Burmese Armed Forces later conducted air strikes in response, the insurgent groups managed to capture many strategic locations. Moreover, armed groups from other parts of the country took advantage of the regime's military weakness to initiate operations in other states, such as KIO attacks in the Sagaing Region, AA attacks in Kayah State and even AA attacks in Rakhine State, causing the informal ceasefire that had been established since 2022 to break down. The increasing violence forcibly displaced more than 300,000 people, worsening the humanitarian situation in the country. After this outbreak of violence, China encouraged negotiations between the parties, trying to broker a ceasefire that was initially agreed on 11 December.<sup>110</sup> However, this agreement failed to end the fighting.

In the previous months, clashes had been reported in the northern states of the country, especially in Kachin State, Chin State and Shan State, and in the Sagaing Region, and in eastern Myanmar, in Kayin State. The Burmese

109. Myanmar was the country with the second highest climate risk in the world from 2000 to 2019, according to the 2021 Global Climate Risk Index.  
110. See the summary on Myanmar in chapter 4 (Peace negotiations in Asia) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.



Armed Forces bombed the positions of the armed groups, which responded with ambushes, attacks and assaults against infrastructure. Particularly serious was an air strike in April against the town of Kanbalu, in the Sagaing Region, in which 170 civilians died. The air strike occurred during the inauguration of some offices of the National Unity Government, which formed after the coup d'état in opposition to the military regime. In July, the KIO launched an attack in Shan State that was the first armed action against security forces in several months. This triggered an escalation in fighting that continued in later months when the TNLA also conducted attacks after several months of military inactivity. In August, the KNU noted that the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was no longer in effect, though seven of the 10 groups that had signed it remained in contact with the government under the NCA. Furthermore, the military regime's persecution of the political opposition persisted. According to data from the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), 25,690 people had been arrested since the 2021 coup d'état, of which 19,891 were still in detention at the end of 2023. Another 4,275 political activists and human rights activists had died at the hands of the security forces.

Thailand (south)	
<b>Start:</b>	2004
<b>Type:</b>	Self-government, Identity Internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Government, BRN and other separatist armed opposition groups
<b>Intensity:</b>	1
<b>Trend:</b>	↓
<b>Summary:</b> The conflict in the south of Thailand dates back to the beginning of the 20th century, when the then Kingdom of Siam and the British colonial power on the Malaysian peninsula decided to split the Sultanate of Pattani, leaving some territories under the sovereignty of what is currently Malaysia and others (the southern provinces of Songkhla, Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat) under Thai sovereignty. During the entire 20th century, there had been groups that had fought to resist the policies of political, cultural and religious homogenisation promoted by Bangkok or to demand the independence of these provinces, of Malay-Muslim majority. The conflict reached its moment of culmination in the 1960s and 70s and decreased in the following decades, thanks to the democratisation of the country. However, the coming into power of Thaksin Shinawatra in 2001, involved a drastic turn in the counterinsurgency policy and preceded a breakout of armed conflict from which the region has been suffering since 2004. The civil population, whether Buddhist or Muslim, is the main victim of the violence, which is not normally vindicated by any group.	

**In line with the clear and sustained decrease in violence in the southern part of the country, in 2023 there were substantially fewer episodes of violence, fatalities and people wounded due to the armed conflict compared to the previous year.** According to the research centre

ACLED, over 40 people lost their lives over the course of the year. Some analysts think that the decrease is more related to the commitments made by the insurgents as part of the negotiating process with the government than to the weakening of the BRN, the main armed group in the three Muslim-majority southern provinces. There is no evidence that other armed organisations were responsible for episodes of violence, unlike in 2022, when the armed group PULO carried out some attacks. Despite the marked drop in the body count, the BRN demonstrated notable operational capacity at various times during the year, carrying out simultaneous and coordinated attacks, operations with dozens of insurgents and heavy weapons against police and military posts and attacks on major infrastructure such as railway services, electricity pylons and mobile telephone towers. In mid-April, for example, the BRN carried out coordinated attacks in six towns in the provinces of Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat. Later, on 11 May, it carried out simultaneous attacks in 30 municipalities in those provinces, and in October it orchestrated three coordinated bomb attacks and an assault on a military checkpoint. The other actions with the greatest impact during the year were an attack against a police convoy in which six people died in September and the detonation of an explosive device two days before the national elections were held in May. The months with the most intense fighting were April and May, shortly after the BRN told the government that it was temporarily pulling out of the negotiations until a new government emerged from the elections in May. The leader of the winning party in the elections, Move Forward, had declared that if he managed to form a government, the negotiating process would be led by civilians (the last three heads of the government panel have been military men), who would take human rights in the region more into consideration, promote a more inclusive and participatory peace process and prioritise the principle of coexistence in a multicultural society. However, Move Forward did not achieve enough of a parliamentary majority to form a government, so after an impasse lasting more than three months, the leader of the opposition party Pheu Thai (which finished second in the May elections) was inaugurated as prime minister after forming an 11-party coalition. On the same day that Srettha Thavisin was sworn in as prime minister, the former prime minister and founder and de facto leader of Pheu Thai, Thaksin Shinawatra, returned to Thailand after spending 15 years in exile to evade several pending criminal charges. Shinawatra was deposed in a coup in 2006 and it was under his administration that the conflict in the Muslim-majority southern provinces escalated to levels unprecedented in previous decades.

**Although the violence declined substantially in 2023, in late August the government extended the state of emergency that has been in force in the south of the country since July 2005. It was the 73rd such extension.** However, in October it announced that the state of emergency was no longer in force in three districts (one in each of the three provinces). In recent years, the state

of emergency has been lifted in ten districts. Along these lines, local and international human rights organisations such as Amnesty International have criticised the state of emergency for years since, among other issues, it grants extraordinary powers to state security forces, gives them immunity for their actions and allows people to be detained without charges for up to 30 days, arguing that it encourages impunity and abuse by the Thai Armed Forces and erodes the people's confidence in them and in the state as a whole. These organisations also call for the repeal of two other laws that govern the southern part of the country (the Internal Security Law and the Martial Law) and grant additional powers and competencies to the state security forces. Thus, in the middle of the year the government declared its intention to gradually draw down the number of troops and reduce the territorial coverage of the state of emergency until 2027. At the end of the year, the new government appointed a new negotiating panel and declared that its priorities would be the reduction of violence (and especially the end of hostilities during the month of Ramadan, an initiative that was carried out in 2022) and greater inclusivity and participation in the process. The Malaysian facilitator of the negotiating process revealed that the BRN had accepted the participation of other armed groups operating in the south in the peace talks, though without offering names or dates. Finally, in June, a group of students from Prince of Songkla University organised a referendum on the independence of the Patani region. The government declared it illegal, while the Thai Armed Forces considered it a threat to the territorial integrity of the country.

### 1.3.4. Europe

#### Eastern Europe

Russia - Ukraine	
<b>Start:</b>	2022
<b>Type:</b>	Government, Territory International
<b>Main parties:</b>	Russia, Wagner Group, Donbas militias, Ukraine
<b>Intensity:</b>	3
<b>Trend:</b>	=

#### Summary:

Under the leadership of Vladimir Putin Russia launched an invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, resulting in the military occupation of southern and eastern parts of the country, and also affected other areas and had serious impacts on human security, including mass forced displacement, extrajudicial killings, disappearances, sexual violence and food and energy insecurity. The invasion of Ukraine was preceded by previous cycles of conflict and failed dialogue: anti-government protests between late 2013 and early 2014 that led to the fall of the government

of President Viktor Yanukovich, Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and war in eastern Ukraine since April 2014 between Russian-backed local militias and the Ukrainian Army. In contravention of international law, Russia's invasion and war targeted Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The antagonism between the US, the EU and NATO on one side and Russia on the other, as well as a failed security architecture in Europe, also influenced the context of the conflict and the prospects for resolution. Between late February and April 2022, Russia and Ukraine held political-military negotiations, which were unsuccessful. The invasion had multidimensional global repercussions, including food insecurity for countries in the MENA region and Africa, a strained international order and greater militarisation in Europe.

#### The war between Russia and Ukraine, caused by the 2022 Russian invasion of the neighbouring country, produced high levels of fatalities and serious impacts on human and environmental security in 2023, while there were no large-scale changes along the military front lines.

Ukraine and Russia did not provide official military body counts. According to OHCHR data, at least 1,931 civilians died and another 6,508 were wounded in 2023 (10,191 dead and 19,139 wounded since the invasion began in 2022, 6% of them minors). The OHCHR also indicated that the real numbers of civilian victims should be considerably higher. **Explosive weapons with a wide blast area were responsible for 84% of the civilian fatalities** and 95% of the civilian injuries. Citing US officials as their source, media reports in August provided a death toll of half a million troops killed or wounded between both sides since 2022.<sup>111</sup> According to the ACLED database, in 2023 there were at least 30,908 fatalities (33,608 in 2022) and 47,784 incidents of battles, violence against civilians, explosions and remote violence (37,909 in 2022). OCHA's 2023 humanitarian assessment included 3.7 million internally displaced people (based on data until September 2023), 14.6 million people in need of humanitarian assistance by 2024, 719,000 people without access to safe or adequate accommodation, 13% of educational facilities destroyed or damaged in 2023 and 256 attacks on health facilities in 2023, in addition to other impacts.<sup>112</sup> Moreover, 6 million Ukrainians were refugees in Europe and another 475,600 were refugees outside Europe, according to UNHCR data from early 2024.

Armed hostilities continued around the military front lines. One of the areas most affected by violence in the first few months of the year was around Bakhmut (Donetsk region). In January, Russia took Soledar (north of Bakhmut). **In May, after 10 months of clashes, Russia announced that it had conquered Bakhmut.** Ukraine had ordered its forces to resist Russia there until the end. Bakhmut was largely destroyed and, according to the ICRC, only about 10,000 inhabitants remained of

111. Various authors, "Troop Deaths and Injuries in Ukraine War Near 500,000, U.S. Officials Say", *The New York Times*, 18 August 2023.

112. OCHA, *Ukraine: Humanitarian Situation Snapshot (December 2023)*, OCHA, 5 February 2024.

the 70,000 that had been there before the war. Even without official death tolls, analysts estimated that several tens of thousands of soldiers had died between both sides in Bakhmut. The leader of the Wagner Group admitted 20,000 casualties of its own.

**In June, Ukraine launched a military counteroffensive in the south and east, which did not result in significant territorial gains in the face of Russia's extensive defensive fortifications and minefields.** At the start of the Ukrainian counteroffensive, on 6 June, an explosion occurred at the Kakhovka Dam (in Kherson Oblast in southern Ukraine, occupied by Russia) that destroyed it and caused an ecological and humanitarian catastrophe. The blast caused the flooding of large areas, contaminated water with chemicals, damaged farm land, harmed fauna and flora, forced people to evacuate, destroyed infrastructure and homes and displaced land mines. The Kakhovka Reservoir, one of the largest in Europe and a source of drinking water for 700,000 people, started to drain, leaving many people without access to water. It also created additional risks at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant. Russia and Ukraine traded blame for the blast. Journalists cited evidence that Russia was behind it.<sup>113</sup> The government of Ukraine, the UN and various NGOs were involved in the humanitarian response in areas under Ukrainian control. Russia denied humanitarian actors access to flood-affected areas under occupation.

Alongside the Ukrainian military counteroffensive, Russia continued to press the attack. **In the final months of the year, Russia intensified its attacks in the east** around the city of Avdiivka (Donetsk Oblast), in territory east of Kupiansk (Kharkiv Oblast) and in areas around Bakhmut. Russia seized the city of Marinka (Donetsk Oblast) in December. In November, Ukraine announced that it had established several landing points on the left bank of the Dnieper River, all areas occupied by Russia. **Throughout the year, Russia bombed various areas in Ukraine, killing and wounding many civilians and troops and damaging civil and other types of infrastructure.** These Russian bombings included an attack in January against a residential building in Dnipro that killed 45 civilians (six of them minors) and wounded 79; a missile attack on 27 June on a busy restaurant in Kramatorsk (Donetsk) that killed 11 civilians, including three minors, and wounded 61, including Ukrainian writer Victoria Amelina; another missile attack on 19 August, a religious holiday, in the northern town of Chernihiv, which hit a central square,

*The invasion and war in Ukraine caused serious impacts in its second year and 14.6 million people in Ukraine were expected to require humanitarian assistance in 2014*

*Ukraine's military counteroffensive did not result in significant territorial gains in 2023, while the war continued to cause serious impacts*

university and theatre, killing seven people, including a minor, and wounding 110 (12 minors); and a third missile attack on 5 October against a café in Groza, in Kharkiv, that killed 59 people, making it one of the most serious massacres. In November and December, Russia carried out several waves of drone and missile attacks against the Ukrainian capital and various cities, killing and wounding civilians and damaging infrastructure. Forty civilians were killed and over 130 were wounded in large-scale airstrikes in several cities on 29 December. Fresh attacks on 30 and 31 December that mainly struck the city of Kharkiv (east) and towns on the front lines killed around 10 and wounded approximately 40.

**In July, Moscow ended its participation in the agreement known as the Black Sea Grain Initiative,** which had been reached in 2022 and renewed several times, including in March and May 2023.<sup>114</sup> After pulling out of the agreement, Russia conducted air strikes against port and grain storage infrastructure on the Black Sea coast, including in Odessa, and along the Danube River. Meanwhile, **Ukraine carried out attacks against the Russian Black Sea military fleet and related infrastructure in Crimea, which intensified in the second half of the year, and forced most of the Russian fleet to withdraw.** Ukraine attacked Russia's Black Sea Fleet headquarters in Sevastopol on 22 September. With the withdrawal of most of the Russian fleet completed, Ukraine partially resumed exporting grain by sea. However, Russia attacked a civilian ship in the port of Odessa with a missile in November.

**Ukraine also stepped up its attacks on Russian territory in 2023.** Ukraine did not explicitly claim responsibility for these attacks. According to ACLED data, there were 1,172 drone strikes in Russian territory between January and December. The number of intercepted drones also rose. There were also attacks against recruitment offices and against railway infrastructure. On 30 December, air strikes against Belgorod, a Russian town near the border with Ukraine, killed 21 people, including three minors, and injured 110. According to Reuters, the air strikes allegedly included cluster bombs. These attacks were preceded by around 30 drone attacks against towns in the oblasts of Moscow, Bryansk, Oryol and Kursk, which were intercepted, according to the Russian authorities.

In other developments during the year, **the Wagner Group, led by Yevgeny Prigozhin, staged a failed armed uprising in Russia on 23 and 24 June.** The mutiny

113. Various authors, "Why the Evidence Suggests Russia Blew Up the Kakhovka Dam", *The New York Times*, 16 June 2023.

114. See the summary on Russia-Ukraine in chapter 5 (Peace negotiations in Europe) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

had been preceded by months of tension between Prigozhin and the Russian military authorities. Wagner Group combatants took the city of Rostov-on-Don and advanced through several regions towards the Russian capital. Described as treason by Putin, the uprising was dismantled and Prigozhin fled for Belarus. He died in August when the plane he was travelling in crashed, killing 10 people. Many analysts blamed Prigozhin's death on the Russian government.

During the year, **the warring parties received foreign military support and intensified their internal production of weapons.** According to data from the Kiel Institute in late October 2023, the United States was Ukraine's main supplier of weapons, military equipment and financial support linked to military objectives (46.3 billion dollars committed), followed by Germany (18.1 billion) and the United Kingdom (6.9 billion). In 2023, many Western countries agreed to provide combat tanks, including Leopard 2 tanks, and the United States said it would send M1 Abrams. In July, Washington approved to send cluster bombs to Ukraine and did so that same month. Cluster bombs are banned by the Convention on Cluster Munitions, which has been ratified by 111 countries and has been in force since 2010. The United States, Ukraine and Russia have not signed the convention. NGOs such as Amnesty International criticised this decision due to the indiscriminate and long-lasting impacts of cluster bombs on the civilian population. Washington also authorised the Netherlands and Denmark to ship US-made F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine as long as the pilots were trained beforehand, which scheduled the F-16s' delivery for 2024. Russia intensified its military ties with Iran and North Korea. The US accused both countries of providing weapons to Russia. The escalation in arms supplies contrasted with international actors' limited initiatives to seek negotiated solutions to the conflict, most of which came from non-Western actors, while Russia and Ukraine continued to reject opening negotiations, as gulfs remained between their conditions and demands.

## South-east Europe

Türkiye (south-east)	
<b>Start:</b>	1984
<b>Type:</b>	Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Government, PKK, TAK, ISIS
<b>Intensity:</b>	1
<b>Trend:</b>	↓
<b>Summary:</b> The PKK, created in 1978 as a political party of a Marxist-Leninist nature and led by Abdullah Öcalan, announced	

in 1984, an armed offensive against the government, undertaking a campaign of military rebellion to reclaim the independence of Kurdistan, which was heavily responded to by the government in defence of territorial integrity. The war that was unleashed between the PKK and the government particularly affected the Kurdish civil population in the south-east of Türkiye, caught in the crossfire and the victims of the persecutions and campaigns of forced evacuations carried out by the government. In 1999, the conflict took a turn, with the arrest of Öcalan and the later communication by the PKK of giving up the armed fight and the transformation of their objectives, leaving behind their demand for independence to centre on claiming the recognition of the Kurdish identity within Türkiye. Since then, the conflict has shifted between periods of ceasefire (mainly between 2000 and 2004) and violence, coexisting alongside democratisation measures and attempts at dialogue (Democratization Initiative in 2008, Oslo Dialogue in 2009-2011 and the Imrali process in 2013-2015). In 2015 the war was restarted. The armed conflict has caused around 40,000 fatalities since the 80s. The war in Syria once again laid bare the regional dimension of the Kurdish issue and the cross-border scope of the PKK issue, whose Syrian branch took control of the predominantly Kurdish areas in the country.

### The armed conflict between Türkiye and the PKK remained active in southeastern Türkiye and mainly in northern Iraq,<sup>115</sup> though it was significantly less bloody.

The International Crisis Group estimated 200 deaths related to the armed conflict in Türkiye and northern Iraq in 2023 (compared to 434 in 2022 and 420 in 2021), 75% of which were members of the PKK. ACLED released a death toll of 137 inside Türkiye. The PKK admitted that it had suffered 179 casualties, 75 in Türkiye and 104 in northern Iraq, and estimated that it had killed 912 members of the security forces and wounded 128. Türkiye estimated that it had "neutralised" (killed or detained) 2,000 combatants in Türkiye, Iraq and Syria. Türkiye continued to view the PKK and the Kurdish forces of Syria as the same actor. Historically, the warring parties have tended to overstate the casualties they have allegedly caused to each other. **In February, the PKK announced a unilateral cessation of hostilities in Türkiye due to the serious humanitarian situation caused by the 7.8 magnitude earthquake** that rocked southern Türkiye and northern Syria that month, followed by thousands of aftershocks and another 7.5 earthquake.<sup>116</sup> The effects of the earthquake in Türkiye were devastating, killing 44,000 people and injuring around 110,000, making 2.7 million homeless, collapsing or seriously damaging 160,000 buildings and causing a great collective trauma. Analysts discussed the limitations of the institutional response and focused on the 2018 government amnesty that legalised 7.4 million buildings with substandard construction and on shortcomings in implementing regulations.<sup>117</sup> After a brief pause in the first few days after the earthquake, the Turkish government maintained its operations against the PKK despite the latter's ceasefire. Turkish security

115. See the summary on Iraq in this chapter.

116. See the summary on Syria in this chapter.

117. Gürsoy, Yaprak, "The earthquake might upend more than Turkey's elections", *Chatham House*, 31 March 2023; Horton, Jake and William Armstrong, "Turkey earthquake: Why did so many buildings collapse?", *BBC*, 9 February 2023.



forces pursued the PKK throughout the year in provinces in southeastern Türkiye and primarily in northern Iraq, initially at low levels, though these later intensified. According to ACLED, February was the month with the lowest level of Turkish air strikes since April 2021. Türkiye increased its attacks starting in March. In April, ACLED indicated a 20% increase in Turkish air strikes against the PKK in northern Iraq. **The PKK extended its ceasefire until after the parliamentary and presidential elections in May, but ended its unilateral truce on 13 June**, citing Türkiye's continued military operations against the group.

After the truce ended, armed hostilities increased. Türkiye claimed to have killed or captured several senior PKK officials during the year. The hostilities worsened in August, when two days of fighting in the Zap region in northern Iraq caused the death of six Turkish soldiers, according to Ankara, and 32 soldiers, according to the PKK. This was followed by air strikes by the Turkish Army. Shortly thereafter, between 22 and 24 August, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan travelled to the capital of Iraq, Baghdad, and to the capital of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq, Erbil, and held meetings with various authorities. In Erbil, he met with KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani and others. According to Hakan, both Baghdad and Erbil were committed to eliminating the PKK from Iraqi soil. In September, Kurdish forces (*peshmerga*) linked to the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), the KRG's ruling party and a trading partner of Türkiye, attacked PKK positions in the governorates of Erbil and Dohuk. This was a rare direct confrontation, according to ACLED. In October, a suicide bomb attack outside the entrance to the headquarters of the Ministry of the Interior's General Directorate of Security in the Turkish capital, Ankara, wounded two police officers. A second attacker was killed by the police. The PKK claimed responsibility for the attack, saying it was a warning to the Turkish government about its military operations against it in Iraq and Syria. Türkiye stepped up air strikes in northern Iraq and Syria in retaliation for the attack in Ankara. In the final months of the year, fresh fighting and attacks took place in northern Iraq between the Turkish Army and the PKK. According to the Turkish government, 26 Kurdish fighters were killed in attacks in northern Iraq and Syria in December in response to the deaths of 12 Turkish soldiers in northern Iraq that month.

The re-election of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in the second round of the presidential election in May and the victory of his Justice and Development Party in the parliamentary elections that same month ensured continuity in the government's approach to the armed conflict with the PKK on the basis of securitization and "fighting against terrorism" in Türkiye and in the region (Iraq and Syria), while Türkiye strengthened relations with Damascus and the KRG in 2023.<sup>118</sup> There were more arrests of Kurdish civilians in Türkiye in 2023, including political opponents, journalists and activists.

On 25 April alone, 110 people were arrested in 21 provinces. Human rights organisations denounced more serious violations of rights by the authorities once again this year. Dynamics of racism and violence against the Syrian refugee population continued, made worse in the aftermath of the earthquake. There were also incidents of political violence, as 2023 was an election year. Dozens of alleged ISIS members were also arrested during the year.

### 1.3.5. Middle East

#### Mashreq

Egypt (Sinai)	
<b>Start:</b>	2014
<b>Type:</b>	System Internationalised internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Government, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (ABM) or Sinai Province (branch of ISIS), pro-government militia Union of Sinai Tribes (UST)
<b>Intensity:</b>	1
<b>Trend:</b>	↓

#### Summary:

The Sinai Peninsula has become a growing source of instability. Since the ouster of Hosni Mubarak in 2011, the area has reported increasing insurgent activity that initially directed its attacks against Israeli interests. This trend raised many questions about maintaining security commitments between Egypt and Israel after the signing of the Camp David Accords in 1979, which led to the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the peninsula. However, alongside the bumpy evolution of the Egyptian transition, jihadist groups based in the Sinai have shifted the focus of their actions to the Egyptian security forces, especially after the coup d'état against the Islamist government of Mohamed Mursi (2013). The armed groups, especially Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (ABM), have gradually demonstrated their ability to act beyond the peninsula, displayed the use of more sophisticated weapons and broadened their targets to attack tourists as well. ABM's decision to pledge loyalty to the organisation Islamic State (ISIS) in late 2014 marked a new turning point in the evolution of the conflict. Its complexity is determined by the influence of multiple factors, including the historical political and economic marginalisation that has stoked the grievances of the Bedouins, the majority population in the Sinai; the dynamics of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; and regional turmoil, which has facilitated the movement of weapons and fighters to the area. In 2023, the crisis in Gaza added uncertainty and challenges to the situation in Sinai.

The armed conflict in the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt was significantly less bloody in 2023. Despite the usual difficulties in obtaining information on the dynamics in the region, **the available data point to a reduction in violent incidents** that in recent years have pitted members of a branch of the armed group Islamic State (ISIS) that calls itself Sinai Province (Wilayat Sinai) against the Egyptian Army supported by tribal militias.

118. See the summaries on Syria and Iraq in this chapter.

There was hardly any information about clashes or armed attacks, except for one incident at police facilities near Arish that resulted in the death of four people and another in September that killed seven people in North Sinai Governorate, though it was unclear whether it was an attack or an accident. According to ACLED, a dozen people died in Egypt in events linked to clashes or bomb attacks during 2023. This is a significant decrease compared to previous years, when various violent episodes with several dozen fatalities had been reported in Sinai: in 2022, it was estimated that 272 people had died in acts of armed violence and in 2021 the death toll had been between 150 and 220. Early in the year, the Egyptian prime minister and chief of the General Staff visited the North Sinai area and stressed that the security situation was stable and that state institutions were fully functioning. **In January, Egyptian President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi said that Egypt “had largely succeeded in eliminating terrorism in Sinai”.** In the following months, it emerged that ISIS militants had retreated to a mountainous area in central Sinai.

*Even though the armed conflict in the Sinai Peninsula was significantly less bloody, the repercussions of the crisis in Gaza cast uncertainty on the future of the region*

Alongside these developments, **local and international human rights organisations continued to complain about abuses committed by the Egyptian authorities during their military campaign in Sinai.** For example, Human Rights Watch (HRW) criticised the Egyptian security forces for the **arbitrary arrest of women and girls related to alleged members of ISIS.**<sup>119</sup> After documenting over 20 cases that occurred between 2017 and 2022, HRW warned that more than half the women and girls had been incommunicado for periods of between two weeks and six months and that some of them had been beaten and subjected to electroshocks by members of the National Security Agency. The arrests were intended to obtain information about their relatives and/or pressure the alleged suspects to surrender. HRW claims that some of these women had been victims of the ISIS branch, as they had been raped or forced to marry, and that they had been arrested after escaping and seeking help from the authorities. Sinai Foundation for Human Rights also reported that **tribal militias collaborating with the Egyptian Army in the campaign against ISIS had recruited minors**, even as young as 16, for logistical and combat activities, some of whom had died or been injured.<sup>120</sup> Additionally, several Egyptian human rights organisations condemned **the use of force by the security forces against peaceful protests staged by hundreds of people forcibly displaced by the anti-ISIS campaign** in northeastern Sinai since 2013, particularly around Rafah and Sheikh Zuwaid.<sup>121</sup> The demonstrators demanded the right to return to their homes and blasted the failure of

the authorities, who had pledged to allow these people to return before 20 October 2023. The human rights organisations recalled that under the pretext of the anti-terrorist campaign, the Egyptian government had violated the human rights of the people in the area on multiple occasions, forcibly displacing nearly 150,000 residents of North Sinai, destroying thousands of homes and degrading thousands of hectares of agricultural land. The organisations also repeated that the tribal militias’ cooperation with the Egyptian authorities to eradicate ISIS from the area reflected in part the latter’s promises regarding the return of the displaced population. The protests in Sinai intensified in the last quarter of the year amid fears of Israel’s plans to forcibly displace the Palestinian population there from Gaza. **The crisis in Gaza also created uncertainty about the future of the Sinai Peninsula.** According to reports, in December Cairo rejected a request from Benjamin Netanyahu’s government to provide military access to the Philadelphi/Salaheddin corridor. Known by both names, the corridor is a 14-kilometre strip of land between Gaza and Egypt that is demilitarised in accordance with the peace agreement signed between Israel and Egypt in 1979. The Israeli government claims that Hamas uses this area to bring weapons into the Gaza Strip, though the Egyptian authorities deny the accusation. **Tensions around this corridor threatened to deteriorate relations between Israel and Egypt, while analysts warned of the possible remilitarisation of the Sinai Peninsula.** In fact, Egypt had already gradually remilitarised it in recent years as part of its anti-ISIS campaign, with Israel’s secret consent. Given the escalation of violence since October, Cairo became involved in initiatives to try to mediate between Hamas and Israel, motivated to avoid the repercussions of the Gaza crisis on its soil, and particularly the possible entry of Palestinian refugees into Sinai and the reactivation of armed groups.<sup>122</sup>

Iraq	
Start:	2003
Type:	System, Government, Identity, Resources Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, Iraqi military and security forces, Kurdish forces (peshmerga), Shia militias Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) and Saraya Salam, Sunni militias, ISIS, international anti-ISIS coalition led by USA, USA, Iran, Türkiye
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↓

119. Human Rights Watch, *Egypt: Women Abused Over Alleged ISIS Ties*, 17 May 2023.  
120. Sinai Foundation for Human Rights, *I Was Afraid...I Was Only 17*, 8 August 2023.  
121. Sinai Foundation for human Rights, *Egypt: Authorities must stop security violence against civilians in northeastern Sinai, and allow the displaced to return to their lands*, 26 October 2023.  
122. See the summary on Israel-Palestine in the chapter 6 (Peace negotiations in the Middle East) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

---

### Summary:

The invasion of Iraq by the international coalition led by the USA in March 2003 (using the alleged presence of weapons of mass destruction as an argument and with the desire to overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein due to his alleged link to the attacks of the 11th September 2001 in the USA) started an armed conflict in which numerous actors progressively became involved: international troops, the Iraqi armed forces, militias and rebel groups and Al Qaeda, among others. The new division of power between Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish groups within the institutional setting set up after the overthrow of Hussein led to discontent among numerous sectors. The violence has increased, with the armed opposition against the international presence in the country superimposing the internal fight for the control of power with a marked sectarian component since February 2006, mainly between Shiites and Sunnis. Following the withdrawal of the US forces in late 2011, the dynamics of violence have persisted, with a high impact on the civilian population. The armed conflict worsened in 2014 as a result of the rise of the armed group Islamic State (ISIS) and the Iraqi government's military response, backed by a new international coalition led by the United States. The levels of violence have been reduced since 2018, after the announcement of defeat of ISIS, although the group continues to operate with actions of lower intensity. The country has also been affected by the growing dispute between Washington and Tehran and its competition to influence Iraqi affairs and, since late 2023, by the repercussions of the crisis in Gaza across the entire region.

---

**In 2023, Iraq continued to be the scene of a high-intensity armed conflict involving many different actors with a persistent impact on civilians, though it was relatively less bloody than in 2022 and in periods of more intense hostilities (2003-2008 and 2014-2017).** According to data from ACLED, 1,334 deaths were reported in various acts of violence and incidents associated with the armed conflict in Iraq last year, well below the 4,427 counted the year before.<sup>123</sup> Data from Iraq Body Count (IBC) on civilian casualties point to a similar trend: 537 in 2023 compared to 740 in 2022.<sup>124</sup> The UN mission in the country, UNAMI, also reported the deaths of dozens of civilians in 2023 as a result of unexploded ordnance, explosive devices, armed attacks, firefights, air strikes and other incidents. By the end of the year, 4.9 million people displaced by violence had returned to their homes, but another 1.12 million remained displaced within the country in formal and informal settlements. It was also estimated that over 100,000 people had been displaced due to climate-related issues since 2016.

**The dynamics of violence in the country continued to involve many local, regional and international actors.** The armed group ISIS remained active and led attacks mainly in the governorates of Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala,

Kirkuk, Nineveh and Salah al-Din. Iraqi security forces also continued their operations against the organisation. According to UNAMI, 178 ISIS attacks were reported in the first half of the year, compared to 526 in 2022. This is the lowest figure since the Iraqi authorities declared victory against ISIS in 2017 and is interpreted as a sign of the decline of the group's activity in the country. Through its propaganda media, ISIS claimed responsibility for 141 attacks in Iraq (until November) compared to 401 in 2022 (in the same period), while carrying out a greater proportion of its attacks in Africa. However, according to estimates by UN experts released in the middle of the year, **ISIS still has between 5,000 and 7,000 fighters in Syria and Iraq.** At the same time, Türkiye continued its armed ground and air incursions into northern Iraq as part of its armed conflict with the PKK and related groups, mainly in the governorates of Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah. Ankara framed these actions as the exercise of its "right to self-defence", in contrast to Baghdad, which formally considers them violations of Iraqi sovereignty. Among other events, Türkiye decreed the closure of airspace to or from Sulaymaniyah after reporting an intensification of PKK activities in the area and launching an attack against the head of the Syrian Kurdish forces (YPG).<sup>125</sup> Throughout the year, there were also intra-Kurdish tensions (between the KPD and PUK), disputes and clashes between Shia factions (between the followers of the cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and members of the Iranian-backed Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), among other episodes) and tribal clashes, mainly in the southern part of the country. In 2023, Iran also pressured Iraq to force the withdrawal of several Iranian Kurdish opposition groups from the border area.

During the last quarter, the situation in the country was also affected by the Gaza crisis. Since October, **threats and attacks by many different Iraqi armed actors against US personnel, interests and facilities in Iraq have intensified, in retaliation for its political and military support for Israel.** Positions of the international anti-ISIS military coalition led by Washington were also hit. Most of the actions were claimed by the self-proclaimed Islamic Resistance in Iraq, which brings together several pro-Iranian groups. Washington also stepped up its attacks in the country, mainly against groups such as Kata'ib Hizbullah, Harakat Hezbollah and the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, killing several members of them. At the end of the year, various Iraqi actors criticised the US military attacks in the country and asked why Washington maintains a military presence in Iraq (of around 2,500 troops). The year 2023 marked the 20th anniversary of the US-led invasion of Iraq,

***Starting in the last quarter, as a result of the crisis in Gaza, attacks against US interests in Iraq and US attacks against pro-Iranian militias in the country intensified***

---

123. ACLED Dashboard [Viewed on 3 February 2024].

124. Iraq Body Count [Viewed on 3 February 2024].

125. See the summary on Türkiye (south-east) and on Syria in this chapter.

prompting analysts to assess the situation in the country and warn about the persistent dynamics of violence and the fragile and unstable economic situation it faces. In mid-2023, there were a series of protests in Baghdad and other cities in the country in reaction to the burning of copies of the Quran in Europe. These incidents led to a diplomatic crisis between Iraq and Sweden. In some demonstrations in Iraq, LGTBIQ+ flags were burned.<sup>126</sup>

Israel – Hezbollah <sup>127</sup>	
Start:	2023
Type:	System, Resources, Territory International
Main parties:	Israel, Hezbollah
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↑

**Summary:**  
In the background of this conflict is the Palestinian-Israeli issue and its consequences across the region. The thousands of Palestinian refugees who settled in Lebanon after 1948, together with the leadership of the PLO in 1979, prompted Israel's continuous attacks in the southern part of the country. Israeli forces invaded southern Lebanon in 1978 and again in 1982, claiming to expel Palestinian militias that were using the area to launch attacks on Israel. The Shia political and armed group Hezbollah was created in Lebanon in the early 1980s, during the Lebanese Civil War, for the stated purpose of opposing Israel, rejecting the Western presence in the Middle East and liberating Palestine. Hezbollah's activities led to periodic clashes that culminated in the large-scale Israeli offensive against Lebanon in July 2006. Considered one of the most powerful non-state armed actors in the region, Hezbollah relies on Iran as its main source of external support. In recent years, it has been involved in combat operations in Syria and Iraq and has provided military assistance to other armed groups with similar agendas in the region. In 2023, the crisis in Gaza and the resulting escalation of tensions throughout the Middle East led to a new phase of the armed conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. Since 1978, a UN mission, UNSMIL, has been deployed on the de facto border area between Lebanon and Israel, with an evolving mandate that includes supervising the withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon (2000) and the cessation of hostilities (after the 2006 war).

The rise of tensions throughout the Middle East as a result of the crisis in Gaza opened an especially important front on the de facto border area between Israel and Lebanon. **The increase in the magnitude, frequency and scope of the hostilities between Israeli forces and Hezbollah and the repercussions of the violence led the situation to be classified as an armed**

**conflict by the end of 2023.** The tension between Israel and the Shia party and militia had already led to hostile and bellicose rhetoric and exchanges of threats since the beginning of the year. One of the main elements of friction was Jerusalem and particularly the Israeli authorities' actions at the Temple Mount, which were rejected by Hezbollah and other Arab and Muslim actors. In January, in response to the controversial visit to the area by the new far-right Israeli Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah warned that violations of the status quo at the Temple Mount could encourage regional chaos. In April, the Israeli police's crackdown on Palestinians at the Al-Aqsa Mosque<sup>128</sup> led to the launch of more than 30 rockets from southern Lebanon to northern Israel in what was considered the largest cross-border strike since the 2006 war. Israel blamed the attack on Hamas and conducted air strikes against suspected Hezbollah facilities in Lebanon. In the months that followed, various armed exchanges were reported in the disputed border areas, including Shebaa Farms and Ghajar. These types of incidents had increased since mid-2022. In June, Hezbollah claimed to have shot down an Israeli drone that had entered Lebanese airspace in the Zibqin area (south).

The situation deteriorated starting in October. **Since the Hamas attacks and the start of the Israeli military campaign in Gaza, there have been warnings of repercussions on the de facto border area between Israel and Lebanon and of intensification of the frequency and scope of exchanges of fire along the Blue Line.**<sup>129</sup> Israeli forces and Hezbollah fighters participated in these events. Members of Palestinian groups such as Hamas' Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades and Islamic Jihad were also sporadically involved and claimed to have attempted to infiltrate from Lebanon. Various analysts indicated that despite the rise in hostilities, the actions of Israel, Iran and groups close to Iran, including Hezbollah, seemed to indicate that neither side wanted to escalate the situation to a greater and direct regional confrontation. Hezbollah tried to demonstrate its solidarity with the Palestinian people, but it was also careful not to cross a threshold that could drag Lebanon into a new war with Israel at a particularly critical moment for the country, as it is in the grips of a severe political and economic crisis. Despite this approach, by the end of October the almost daily armed exchanges between Hezbollah and Israeli forces had already killed more than 50 people and caused significant displacements of the population. **In his first public address since the events of October, in November, Nasrallah expressed support for Hamas and denounced Israel's actions in Gaza and the complicity of the United States, but he avoided committing Hezbollah**

126. See chapter 3 (Gender, peace and security).  
127. This armed conflict involves and impacts other regional actors in different ways. In previous editions of the report, the dynamics of this dispute were analysed in the chapter on Socio-political crises under the title "Israel – Syria – Lebanon" and analyses in recent years have highlighted Iran's growing involvement in the conflict.  
128. See the summary on Israel-Palestine in this chapter.  
129. The Blue Line is the line that marks the zone from which Israeli forces withdrew from southern Lebanon in 2000. Although it is not an international border, in practice it operates as a boundary between Lebanon and Israel.



to further involvement in the conflict. After 7 October, Washington deployed two aircraft carriers to the eastern Mediterranean and increased its military presence in the region, which it explained was meant “to deter any country or group that wanted to take advantage of the instability and confusion” in the area, in an apparent allusion to Iran and Hezbollah. In this context, the temporary truce agreement between the government of Israel and Hamas mediated by Qatar in late November was also respected for all practical purposes in the border area between Israel and Lebanon. However, the collapse of the truce and the resumption of hostilities led to a significant escalation of violence in early December.

**At the end of the year, the death toll in the conflict had risen to at least 165 people: 134 Hezbollah fighters, a Lebanese soldier and around 20 Lebanese civilians, in addition to nine Israeli soldiers and one Israeli civilian.** The violence and fragile security situation in the border area had also **forcibly displaced around 100,000 Israelis, evacuated by the authorities in October for an indefinite period, and another 50,000 Lebanese residents in southern Lebanon.** During the last quarter, **acts of violence in Syria involving Israel, pro-Iranian militias and Hezbollah also increased.**<sup>130</sup> Lebanese militiamen also launched attacks from Syria against Israel, while Israeli air strikes reportedly caused the death of more than 15 Hezbollah members in Damascus, Homs and Quneitra. By the end of the year, across the region there was generally greater volatility and less containment by different armed actors, which were more inclined to use force. The assassination of Hamas’ second-in-command in Beirut and of two other Hezbollah leaders in southern Lebanon in separate Israeli attacks in the first week of January 2024 anticipated a possible escalation of violence in the coming year. The UN mission in Lebanon (UNIFIL) remained operational in 2023 and was also affected by the escalation of violence and exchanges of fire starting in October. For example, a shell hit its command centre in Naqoura and two members of the mission were wounded in fighting that affected UNIFIL positions. The UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon held meetings with senior Lebanese officials and diplomatic representatives in which she stressed the need to ease tensions and prevent the country from getting dragged into a larger conflict, considering the fragility of the political and economic situation in the country, as the president’s term had expired in October 2022 and the government was still provisional. Another factor to consider in this dynamic are the tensions between Palestinian groups based in Lebanon. During 2023, several clashes between armed Fatah factions and Palestinian Islamist groups in the Sidon refugee camp between July and September claimed at least 30 lives and wounded hundreds of people.

*The increase in the magnitude, frequency and scope of the hostilities between Israeli forces and Hezbollah led the situation to be classified as an armed conflict at the end of 2023*

Following the intervention of the speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, a ceasefire agreement was reached in mid-September that led to the deployment of a joint force inside the camp and of the Lebanese Armed Forces on its perimeter.

Israel – Palestine	
<b>Start:</b>	2000
<b>Type:</b>	Self-government, Identity, Territory International
<b>Main parties:</b>	Israeli government, settler militias, PA, Fatah (Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades), Hamas (Ezzedin al-Qassam Brigades), Islamic Jihad, FPLP, FDLP, Popular Resistance Committees, Salafists groups, brigades of Jenin, Nablus and Tubas, Lion’s Den
<b>Intensity:</b>	3
<b>Trend:</b>	↑

**Summary:**  
The conflict between Israel and the various Palestinian actors started up again in 2000 with the outbreak of the Second Intifada, favoured by the failure of the peace process promoted at the beginning of the 1990s (the Oslo Accords, 1993-1994). The Palestinian-Israeli conflict started in 1947 when the United Nations Security Council Resolution 181 divided Palestinian territory under British mandate into two states and soon after proclaimed the state of Israel (1948), without the state of Palestine having been able to materialise itself since then. After the 1948-49 war, Israel annexed West Jerusalem and Egypt and Jordan took over control of Gaza and the West Bank, respectively. In 1967, Israel occupied East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza after winning the “Six-Day War” against the Arab countries. It was not until the Oslo Accords that the autonomy of the Palestinian territory would be formally recognised, although its introduction was to be impeded by the military occupation and the control of the territory imposed by Israel.

**Violence intensified exponentially starting in the last quarter of 2023, reaching levels unprecedented in decades, with wide-ranging effects not only for the Palestinian-Israeli issue, but throughout the Middle East.** The situation had already shown signs of deterioration in the first few months of the year, with multiplying incidents and acts of violence, an increase in Israeli incursions into the West Bank and provocative rhetoric and actions by members of the Israeli cabinet at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, among other events. In May, shootouts between Israeli forces and Islamic Jihad in Gaza resulted in the deaths of 33 Palestinians and one Israeli. **In the middle of the year, the UN warned that Palestinian deaths in various acts of violence in the West Bank already exceeded all those reported in 2022 and made for the highest**

130. See the summary on Syria in this chapter.

**body count since 2005.** It also warned that attacks by Israeli settlers had increased by 40% in the first half of the year, reaching the worst level since such data began to be collected in 2006. In this context, **on 7 October, an unprecedented attack by Hamas and Islamic Jihad against several Israeli towns and a music festival in areas adjacent to Gaza claimed around 1,200 lives, including Israelis and foreigners, while nearly 200 people were taken hostage.** Benjamin Netanyahu's government declared itself in a "state of war" and launched a military operation with the stated goal of eliminating Hamas. The Israeli authorities imposed a total siege against Gaza, blocking access to all types of supplies and further tightening the blockade to which they had already subjected it since 2007. At the same time, Israel began an incessant aerial bombardment campaign. Starting in late October, it also launched a ground offensive from northern to southern Gaza, with an intensity of fire and destructive power of extraordinary magnitude. **By the end of the year, more than 25,000 Palestinians had died in the Gaza Strip as a result of the Israeli operations and another 8,000 people were estimated to be buried under the rubble,** while analysts warned that the average mortality rate there was higher than that of any other armed conflict in the world in the 21st century. According to estimates based on Israeli sources, some 175 soldiers had died in fighting with Hamas and other militias since the beginning of the ground operation. Israeli forces claimed to have killed around 8,000 members of the Palestinian group and detained thousands more.

**The Israeli offensive against the Gaza Strip was increasingly denounced as collective punishment due to its devastating impact on its entire population: 70% of the fatal victims of the Israeli offensive were Palestinian women and minors,** reversing the trend observed in the last 15 years in which most (67%) civilian casualties were men.<sup>131</sup> Nearly 10,000 Palestinian girls and boys had died in the attacks, more than all minors who have died in armed conflicts in the world since 2019. The number of the wounded exceeded 60,000, some of them as a result of the use of weapons prohibited in populated areas, such as white phosphorus, as reported by HRW. Israel's systematic attacks against hospitals in the Gaza Strip (less than half were operational by the end of 2023) and the lack of medicine due to the blockade, including anaesthetics and antibiotics, had a direct impact on the possibilities of caring for victims, sick people and pregnant women.<sup>132</sup> By the end of the

***The Israeli offensive against the Gaza Strip was denounced as collective punishment against its population and South Africa brought a case against Israel at the ICJ for violating the Genocide Convention***

***The Gazan population was forced to move several times, was attacked on routes identified as "safe" by Israel and was forced to concentrate in increasingly smaller areas***

year, Israeli bombing had totally or partially destroyed 60% of Gaza's homes and forcibly displaced 75% of the population (1.7 million out of 2.3 million). **The**

**Palestinian population was forced to move several times, first from north to south and then to the west, attacked on routes identified as "safe" by Israel and forced to concentrate in increasingly smaller areas.** By the end of 2023, nearly half the population of Gaza was concentrated in Rafah, on the border with Egypt, in extremely precarious conditions, suffering from a serious lack of hygiene, food, fuel and medicine, and in winter, which further encouraged the proliferation of diseases. At the end of the year, agencies and NGOs warned that practically the entire

Gazan population was at risk of famine. The Israeli attacks also killed more than 100 journalists and many humanitarian workers in Gaza, including over 100 UNRWA workers. The situation in the West Bank worsened significantly, with an intensification of Israeli attacks, including air strikes; imposed restrictions on movement; many arrests, doubling the number of Palestinians detained by Israel; an escalation in attacks by settlers; the forced displacement of more than 2,000 people, half of them minors; and the death of another 200 people, raising the body count due to violence in the West Bank to 551 in 2023. Given these events, **some warned that war crimes and acts of genocide had been committed. In late December, South Africa filed a lawsuit against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), accusing it of violating the Genocide Convention.** In January 2024, the ICJ pursued the lawsuit after identifying plausible signs of genocide and ordered a series of precautionary measures.<sup>133</sup>

Since the escalation started in October, diplomatic channels were activated to try to address the crisis, both to try to guarantee access for humanitarian aid and to achieve a ceasefire. **It was not until November, with the mediation of Qatar, supported by the US and France, that Israel and Hamas agreed to a temporary cessation of hostilities that was in effect for one week.** During this period, over 100 Israeli and foreign hostages were released and 240 women and minors who had been detained in Israeli prisons (many under the category of "administrative detention") were freed. Attempts to establish a new truce or ceasefire continued until the end of 2023. At the same time, the crisis in Gaza gave rise to intense international discussions and tension, especially at the UN, revealing the great political and military support for Israel from the United States

131. UN Women, *Statement on Gaza by UN Women Executive Director Sima Bahous*, 19 January 2024.

132. For more information, see chapter 3 (Gender, peace and security).

133. International Court of Justice, *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel) - The Court indicates provisional measures*, 26 January 2024.

and European countries that refused to demand a ceasefire based on the argument that they did not want to compromise Israel's alleged right to self-defence. Washington vetoed or threatened to veto several draft resolutions during 2023 and the UN Security Council only approved two that were limited to requesting pauses and unimpeded access to humanitarian aid, in addition to the unconditional release of the hostages, as around 136 remained in Gaza. However, it did not demand a sustained and immediate ceasefire under the terms that many had been demanding, including the UN Secretary-General. **The crisis in Gaza also caused a significant rise in tensions and hostilities in the Middle East.** Among other dynamics, it fuelled a growing confrontation between Hezbollah and Israeli forces<sup>134</sup> and the intensification of pro-Iranian militias' attacks on US targets in Iraq and Syria and attacks by Washington against the same groups.<sup>135</sup> In Yemen, the Houthis' attacks against Israel in response to its offensive on Gaza, then against ships that had a connection with or were bound for Israel in the Red Sea, prompted the deployment of an international military operation led by the US and opened another front of instability.<sup>136</sup>

***The crisis in Gaza also caused a significant rise in tensions and hostilities in the Middle East***

Syria	
<b>Start:</b>	2011
<b>Type:</b>	Government, System, Selfgovernment, Identity Internationalised internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Government, pro-government militias, Free Syrian Army (FSA), Ahrar al-Sham, Syrian Democratic Forces (coalition that includes the YPG/YPJ militias of the PYD), Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (formerly al-Nusra Front), Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), ISIS, international anti-ISIS coalition led by USA, Türkiye, Hezbollah, Iran, Russia, Wagner Group, Israel
<b>Intensity:</b>	3
<b>Trend:</b>	↑

**Summary:**  
Controlled by the Ba'ath party since 1963, the Republic of Syria has been governed since the 1970s by two presidents: Hafez al-Assad and his son, Bashar, who took office in 2000. A key player in the Middle East and the Arab Israeli conflict, internally the regime has been characterised by authoritarianism and fierce repression of the opposition. The arrival of Bashar al-Assad in the government raised expectations for change, following the implementation of some liberalising measures. However, the regime put a stop to these initiatives, which alarmed the establishment, made up of the army, the Ba'ath and the Alawi minority. In

2011, popular uprisings in the region encouraged the Syrian population to demand political and economic changes. The brutal response of the government unleashed a severe crisis in the country, which led to the beginning of an armed conflict with serious consequences for the civil population. The militarisation and proliferation of armed actors have added complexities to the Syrian scenario, severely affected by regional and international dynamics.

Syria continued to be the scene of one of the most intense armed conflicts in the world. **In 2023, the violence rebounded slightly compared to recent years, though the death toll was far below what it had reached in the worst period, five years ago, when tens of thousands of people died per year.** According to figures released by ACLED, **6,254 deaths were reported due to acts of violence** linked to the conflict in 2023, more than the 5,649 fatalities in 2022 and the 5,735 in 2021.<sup>137</sup> The body count kept by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) totalled 4,361, but points to the same trend: it was highest in three years and reverses the downward trend observed. In fact, the SOHR indicated that 2022 had been considered the year with the lowest number of victims since the armed conflict began in 2011. SOHR data also indicates that 1,889 of the total number of people killed in 2023 were civilians, including 307 minors, which brings the number of girls and boys killed since the hostilities broke out to almost 24,000. **Violations of human rights and international humanitarian law continued to be reported throughout the country** during the year, both in areas controlled by Bashar Assad's regime and in those under the control of non-state actors. **The economic and humanitarian situation continued to deteriorate, with over 15 million people in need of assistance.** The challenges in this area were also aggravated by the consequences of the devastating earthquake that rocked Türkiye and Syria at the beginning of the year.

**The earthquake in February caused between 6,000 and 8,500 deaths and extensive destruction in northwestern Syria, an area controlled by forces opposed to the regime and home to a large internally displaced population** due to the armed conflict. The international response, including from the UN, was denounced as insufficient, while Damascus imposed obstacles to the delivery of aid. The Syrian regime attempted to take advantage of the impact of the earthquake to rehabilitate itself internationally and control the flows of humanitarian assistance and benefited from a partial lifting of sanctions. In fact, the catastrophe allowed Damascus to intensify diplomatic contact with several Arab countries and facilitated Syria's readmission into the Arab League in May. The change in the Arab League's

134. See the summary on Israel – Hezbollah in this chapter.  
135. See the summary on Iraq and Syria in this chapter.  
136. See the summary on Yemen in this chapter.  
137. ACLED Dashboard [Viewed on 5 February 2024].

stance towards Damascus could partially be explained by the desire to stop the flow of drugs leaving Syria with the complicity of the regime, particularly Captagon, and to address the issue of the Syrian refugee population in several countries in the region. With regard to the refugees, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic stated that the (relative) decline in the levels of violence is not in itself a criterion to guarantee safe return, considering the frequent reports of persecution, attacks and reprisals against those who have gone back.

**Despite the devastation caused by the earthquakes, fighting between the warring parties resumed after a brief truce and hostilities intensified, especially in the last quarter of the year.** The country remained divided into different areas of influence with various dynamics of violence and the involvement of many different armed actors. The most notable dynamics and acts of violence during the year included continued fighting in the northwest, mainly between Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and pro-government forces in areas of Idlib, Aleppo, Hama and Latakia. Following the death of a Russian colonel in an HTS attack in May, Russian and Syrian forces launched intense air strikes in southern Latakia. Competition between different factions for material and territorial interests also continued in the area. **The hostilities escalated in the northwest in early October after an attack on a military academy in Homs killed more than 100 people.** This led to fresh clashes and the forced displacement of over 120,000 people in the most serious escalation in the area since 2019. Fighting between the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), led by Kurdish YPG/YPJ forces, and Turkish military forces in areas around Aleppo, Al-Hasakah and Raqqah persisted in the northeast.<sup>138</sup> Clashes also took place at the end of the year between the SDF and Arab tribal groups, forcibly displacing around 27,000 people. SDF and US forces also conducted various operations against ISIS militants in 2023. Meanwhile, **ISIS continued to carry out attacks in eastern and southern Syria.** One of its bloodiest attacks occurred in Homs Governorate in February and claimed over 60 lives. In May, the organisation claimed responsibility for its first attack in Damascus since 2021. ISIS was also involved in clashes with Syrian government forces and Wagner Group mercenaries. In southern Syria, attacks continued against members and people related to the Syrian government, former

*Despite the devastation caused by the earthquake, fighting between the warring parties resumed in Syria after a brief truce and hostilities intensified in the last quarter of the year*

*In June the UN General Assembly resolved to establish an independent institution to clarify the whereabouts of all missing persons in Syria*

opposition combatants who have signed “reconciliation” agreements with it and civilians. In Daraa Governorate in June, Syrian forces launched a series of air strikes and military raids against armed opposition groups that refuse to “reconcile” with the government. They were the first such attacks in the area in five years. Additionally, incidents associated with drug trafficking multiplied, prompting a direct incursion by Jordan that caused the death of seven civilians in May. Amman had warned that it would take military action in Syria to halt drug trafficking and thereby joined the four other foreign countries that had intervened and/or were present in Syria: Iran, Russia, the United States and Israel. **Israeli forces conducted many air raids during the year, including attacks on the airports in Aleppo and Damascus.** In the first half of the year, the Israeli government acknowledged that it had doubled its attacks against Iranian targets in Syria since December 2022. **The**

**instability stemming from the crisis in Gaza also had repercussions in Syria.** Thus, Israeli attacks in Syria against Iranian and Hezbollah targets intensified,<sup>139</sup> as did attacks by forces allegedly backed by Iran from Syria. Moreover, from October until the end of the year alone, pro-Iranian militias launched over 50 attacks against US forces stationed in Syria and Iraq, which led to counterattacks by Washington.<sup>140</sup> In late December, Tehran warned Israel of retaliation for the death of Iranian General Razi Mousavi in an Israeli strike in Syria. Throughout the year, mines and other explosive devices killed many civilians in different parts of the country.

In June, as a result of Syrian civil society initiatives, especially by family organisations, **the UN General Assembly resolved to establish an independent institution to clarify the whereabouts of all missing persons in Syria.** In 2023, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic also published an extensive report on continued mistreatment and torture in the country during the period 2020-23. It also covers more cases of people who had died in detention. The report studies cases that occurred in government detention centres and three armed groups that control territory and hold detainees (HTS, SNA, SDF) and concludes that, although the forms of torture and patterns of arbitrary detention and forced disappearance are similar, the scale is significantly larger in government-controlled areas.<sup>141</sup> In northeastern

138. See the summary on Türkiye (south-east) in this chapter.

139. See the summary on Israel – Hezbollah in this chapter.

140. See the summary on Iraq in this chapter.

141. HRC, *No End in Sight: Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023*, A/HRC/53/CRP.5, 10 July 2023.

142. For more information, see chapter 3 (Gender, peace and security).



Syria, over 51,000 people, mostly women and children under 12 years old, including around 35,000 foreigners, were still being held in the al-Hawl and Roj camps. Regarding the gender impacts of the conflict and the specific repercussions on women and girls, during 2023 there were warnings about the enormous difficulties that female heads of household faced in meeting their basic needs, problems in accessing reproductive health, an increase in forced and early marriage throughout the country and worsening situations of discrimination and violence in both the public and private spheres.<sup>142</sup>

# The Gulf

Yemen	
<b>Start:</b>	2004
<b>Type:</b>	System, Government, Identity Internationalised internal
<b>Main parties:</b>	Armed forces loyal to the internationally recognised Government, followers of the cleric al Houthi (alShabaab al-Mumen/Ansar Allah), tribal militias linked to al-Alhmar clan, Salafist militias (including Happy Yemen Brigades), armed groups linked to the Islamist Islah party, separatist groups under the umbrella of the Southern Transitional Council (STC), Joint Forces (including the Giants Brigades), Security Belt Forces, AQAP, ISIS, international coalition led by Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), the United States and the international military coalition involved in Operation Prosperity Guardian
<b>Intensity:</b>	3
<b>Trend:</b>	↓

## Summary:

The conflict started in 2004, when the followers of the religious leader al-Houthi, belonging to the Shiite minority, started an armed rebellion in the north of Yemen. The government assured that the rebel forces aimed to re-establish a theocratic regime such as the one that governed in the area for one thousand years, until the triumph of the Republican revolution in 1962. The followers of al-Houthi denied it and accused the government of corruption and not attending to the northern mountainous regions, and also opposed the Sanaa alliance with the US in the so-called fight against terrorism. The conflict has cost the lives of thousands of victims and has led to massive forced displacements. Various truces signed in recent years have been successively broken with taking up of hostilities again. As part of the rebellion that ended the government of Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2011, the Houthis took advantage to expand areas under its control in the north of the country.

They have been increasingly involved in clashes with other armed actors, including tribal militias, sectors sympathetic to Salafist groups and to the Islamist party Islah and fighters of AQAP, the affiliate of al-Qaeda in Yemen. The advance of the Houthis to the centre and south of the country in 2014 exacerbated the institutional crisis and forced the fall of the Yemeni government, leading to an international military intervention led by Saudi Arabia in early 2015. In a context of internationalisation, the conflict has acquired sectarian tones and a regional dimension. The conflict has been acquiring a growing regional and international dimension and has been influenced by tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia and between Washington and Tehran. Additionally, Yemen has been the scene of al-Qaeda activities since the 1990s, especially since the merger of the Saudi and Yemeni branches that gave rise to al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in 2009. As of 2014, the group has taken advantage of the climate of instability in the country to advance its objectives and its militiamen have been involved in clashes with the Houthis, with government forces, with UAE troops and with tribal militias. Since al-Qaeda's attack on the USS Cole in 2000, the US has been involved in periodic attacks against the group. The conflict in Yemen has also favoured ISIS activity in the country. In 2023, the crisis in Gaza and its repercussions throughout the region also had an impact on Yemen, especially after the Houthis decided to launch attacks against Israel, Israeli ships and ships bound for Israel in the Red Sea, a route through which 15% of world maritime transport passes. The Houthis' actions prompted the establishment of an international military coalition in the area, made up of 20 countries and led by the United States, to launch Operation Prosperity Guardian.

In line with the trend observed in 2022, **the armed conflict was significantly less deadly in 2023 than in previous years. However, the body count remained high and the armed conflict in Yemen continued to be considered one of high intensity.** According to data collected by ACLED, at least 3,174 people died during the year in different acts of violence (battles, explosions and remote violence and violence against civilians),<sup>143</sup> which was just half those in 2022 (6,721 deaths) and well below the death tolls in previous years (between 20,000 and 23,000 fatalities per year from 2019 to 2021). Data gathered by the Civilian Impact Monitoring Project (CIMP), which documents civilian deaths in armed violence in Yemen, counted 501 people killed and 1,174 wounded in 2023, compared to 716 killed and 1,602 wounded the previous year. Since 2018, the total civilian deaths have hovered around 17,000, according to the CIMP.<sup>144</sup> **The relatively lower body count owes fundamentally to the de facto extension of the UN-backed truce agreed in 2022.** Though it was not formally renewed in September 2022, the truce and other aspects of the agreement generally remained in force until 2023. This happened in a year when the negotiations to address the dispute were more prominent, particularly direct contacts between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis mediated by Oman in a regional

143. ACLED Dashboard [Viewed on 1 February 2024].

144. Civilian Impact Monitoring Project [Viewed on 1 February 2024].

scenario also affected by the diplomatic rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, regional actors with important interests in the conflict.<sup>145</sup> Meanwhile, the UN continued to promote intra-Yemeni dialogue and the implementation of the Stockholm Agreement (2018). As part of this agreement, over a thousand prisoners were released in April: 869 freed by the Houthis and by the internationally recognised Saudi-backed government of Yemen and 104 released by Riyadh.

**The hostilities continued in a context of fragility and complexity in 2023 due to the involvement of many different armed actors.**

Thus, there were clashes and exchanges of fire between the Houthis and pro-government forces along the front lines, but also acts of violence between armed groups not associated with the Houthis and tribal clashes, both in areas controlled by the government and in others held by the Houthis. At the same time, there were incidents blamed on the al-Qaeda branch in the country, AQAP, which remains active in the governorates of Abyan, Bayda, Hadramawt and Shabwah. AQAP also ceased its attacks against the Houthis in 2023 and set its sights on the main secessionist platform in southern Yemen, the Southern Transitional Council and the Security Belt Forces. Anti-Houthi forces, including the Presidential Leadership Council, the institution that has replaced the presidency, also continued to show internal struggles and conflicts. The use of provocative and bellicose rhetoric by various armed actors persisted and the Houthis displayed their military power in several parades and military exercises. The types of weapons displayed in these exhibitions, together with complaints about violations of the arms embargo against the Houthis, confirmed the group's own statements about the reinforcement of its land and naval military capabilities.

**Various actors in the armed conflict continued to be denounced for violations of international humanitarian law and human rights,** as documented by the international Panel of Experts established by the UN.<sup>146</sup> This panel documented arbitrary detentions, forced disappearances, torture and mistreatment, the recruitment of minors, sexual and gender-based violence, restrictions on freedom of expression and obstruction of the delivery of humanitarian aid. The Houthis were especially singled out for the alarming rise in the recruitment of minors, especially in summer camps; by the stricter imposition

*The relatively lower body count in Yemen owes fundamentally to the de facto extension of the UN-backed truce agreed in 2022*

*At the end of the year, the situation in Yemen was also influenced by the crisis in Gaza, especially after the Houthis decided to launch attacks against Israel and Israeli-owned or Israel-bound ships in the Red Sea*

of *mahram*, a system of control and surveillance imposed on women through male “guardians” that, among other things, continued to affect their access to sexual and reproductive health services; and by harassment and defamation campaigns against women

activists, including those from the diaspora. During 2023, the women's organisation Abductees Mothers Association informed the UN Security Council of the results of its investigations, which **from 2016 to mid-2023 confirmed the kidnapping of 9,568 people by different actors in the conflict, the vast majority of them by the Houthis** (9,130 people, including 130 women). Thousands of people who have

been released have reported to have been tortured and at least 140 have died as a result of mistreatment or poor medical practices while they were detained. By the end of the year, around 18 million people needed humanitarian assistance and were facing food insecurity. Malnutrition rates were especially alarming among the child population and 4.5 million people were displaced, some of them as a result of multiple forced displacements in recent years.

**Negotiations between Riyadh and the Houthis intensified during the second half of 2023 and it emerged that the parties had made progress in defining a road map for a peace process in Yemen.**

At the year's end, the UN special envoy for Yemen continued to coordinate the different diplomatic efforts and connect the results of the Omani track with a dialogue involving the various Yemeni actors. This happened amid some groups' concern about the consequences of a possible agreement between Riyadh and the Houthis that could exclude the interests and concerns of other Yemeni groups. In December, there were indications of progress on a commitment to set the conditions for a global ceasefire and resume the UN-backed process. However, by that time the situation in Yemen had also been affected by the crisis in Gaza and growing regional instability.<sup>147</sup> In mid-October, **the Houthis decided to launch a series of attacks against Israel, then against Israeli-owned and/or Israel-bound ships in the Red Sea,** saying they would only halt

these attacks once Israel stopped its military operation in the Gaza Strip. One of their most public attacks took place in November, when the Houthis released a video of a group of masked men disembarking from a helicopter and seizing a merchant ship that turned out to be owned by one of the main magnates of

145. See the summary on Yemen in chapter 6 (Peace negotiations in the Middle East) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

146. UNSC, *Final report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2140 (2014)*, S/2023/833, 2 November 2023.

147. See the summary on Israel-Palestine in this chapter.

Israel. In this context, the US fleet deployed in the area intervened on several occasions to halt Houthi activities. In December, Washington announced an international military operation in the area (Operation Prosperity Guardian) involving 20 countries with the stated objective of protecting the Red Sea trade route,

through which 15% of world maritime traffic passes. According to media reports, at the end of the year Washington was pressuring Saudi Arabia to postpone its agreement with the Houthis on the future of Yemen and urging it to join the international military coalition against them.<sup>148</sup>

---

148. See “Yemen: escalating tension in the Red Sea” in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Risk scenarios and opportunities for peace*, January 2024.