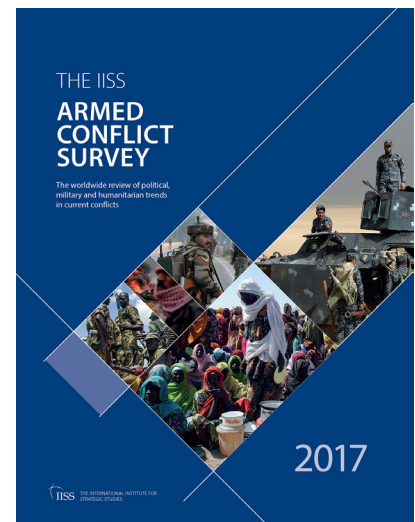


THE IISS

# ARMED CONFLICT SURVEY 2017

THE WORLDWIDE REVIEW OF POLITICAL, MILITARY AND HUMANITARIAN TRENDS IN CURRENT CONFLICTS



## URBAN CENTRES INCREASING FOCUS FOR WARFARE AND DISPLACEMENT

*Towns and cities are increasingly bearing the brunt of regional conflicts. During 2016, competing forces often resorted to using urban centres as a staging ground for violence, while a growing tendency among refugee populations to settle in towns and cities placed unprecedented strain on host communities and infrastructure.*

Conflict and displacement are increasingly taking place in cities. Approximately half of the 36 conflicts featured in the *Armed Conflict Survey 2017*, and all of the high-intensity ones, have a significant urban component.

Turkey's conflict with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) resulted in trench warfare in southern population centres, with the number of recorded fatalities reaching 3,000 over the course of 2016, the highest level since 1997. A surge in attacks on cities and public places put civilians in great danger.

Likewise, the conflict in South Sudan touched urban areas in the southern regions of the country. In Afghanistan, the Taliban extended its strategy of carrying out suicide attacks in urban centres. Similarly, most of the highest-casualty attacks in Pakistan, many of them sectarian in nature, occurred in urban areas.

The latest figures on refugee movements to non-Western countries demonstrate that the long-term trend of refugees settling in urban centres is now being amplified by mass displacement resulting from the Syrian conflict. Around 90% of Syrian refugees have settled in urban and peri-urban centres in neighbouring countries, according to data published by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

The trend marks an important shift away from the more traditional pattern of hosting refugees in designated camps, commonly located in border regions. This places unprecedented pressure on socio-economic infrastructure while increasing uncertainty for host communities, aid

agencies and governments. It also complicates the provision of timely and equitable assistance, given that the majority of refugee communities are increasingly geographically dispersed.

## FALL IN GLOBAL CONFLICT FATALITIES

*Nigeria-based Boko Haram's diminished capacity to carry out lethal attacks was a key factor in the decline in global conflict deaths in 2016. While Syria hosted the world's most lethal conflict, Mexico was home to the second-most deadly, with the level of fatalities there surpassing those in Iraq or Afghanistan.*

Fatalities in the world's conflicts declined to 157,000 in 2016, down from 167,000 in 2015 and 180,000 in 2014. Fatalities in ten high-intensity conflicts account for 90% of fatalities worldwide. The war in Syria resulted in a further 50,000 deaths in 2016, bringing the total since 2011 to around 290,000 – more than twice the number recorded in Bosnia's four-year fratricidal conflict in the 1990s.

The conflict in Mexico led to 23,000 fatalities in 2016, with the number of homicides rising in 22 of the country's 32 states. The largest rises in fatalities were registered in key battleground states where competing, increasingly fragmented cartels vie for control. The violence grew worse as the cartels expanded the territorial reach of their campaigns, seeking to 'cleanse' areas of rivals in their efforts to secure a monopoly on drug-trafficking routes and other criminal assets.

There was a near-70% fall in fatalities relating to Boko Haram, which previously accounted for almost half of all conflict fatalities in sub-Saharan Africa. Conflict intensity in other Nigerian states diminished, while the group's capacity to launch large-scale attacks in major cities decreased. Nevertheless, the group was able to perpetrate a series of attacks in Cameroon and the wider Lake Chad region, resulting in approximately 800 fatalities outside Nigeria.

### **PEACEKEEPING IN CRISIS**

*The number of United Nations peacekeepers currently deployed on operations is close to an all-time high, but serious resourcing and organisational problems threaten to undermine the ability of these multinational forces to deliver the stability that host governments need if they are to achieve political settlements.*

Under-resourced, overextended and chronically short of specialist capacities in crucial areas such as engineering, communications, intelligence, aviation and logistics, UN peacekeepers are finding it progressively more difficult to meet rising expectations and reconcile multiple mandates. These can range from disarmament and demobilisation to reintegration, security-sector reform and civilian protection, to monitoring the human-rights records of governments and their opponents.

More than 125 countries are currently contributing the 117,000 personnel deployed to the UN's 16 missions around the world. The organisation's annual peacekeeping budget stands at almost US\$8 billion. But forces under UN command have proved structurally and politically ill-suited to conducting robust, let alone offensive, military operations in civil-war-like settings. In his essay for *Armed Conflict Survey 2017* entitled 'Whither UN Peacekeeping?', Professor Mats Berdal, Director of the Conflict, Security and Development Research Group at King's College London notes, 'today, addressing the limits of peacekeeping requires a sustained, systematic focus on the ways in which the activities of peacekeepers on the ground can reinforce the search for a political settlement'.

### **UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

*Rape and other forms of sexual violence are not an inevitable consequence of war, and are perpetrated only by some armed actors. Understanding this variation has important implications for designing policy for sexual-violence prevention and prosecution efforts, as well as peacekeeping, peacebuilding and transitional justice.*

There are significant documented differences in the perpetration of sexual violence by armed groups during conflict. In the ongoing war in South Sudan, sexual violence is common, widespread and perpetrated by almost all conflict actors. By contrast, more than half of the armed actors in the civil wars that took place in 20 African countries between 2000 and 2009 were not reported to have engaged in rape or other forms of sexual violence.

State actors are more likely than rebel groups to be reported to engage in numerous or widespread levels of rape during civil wars. In their essay for *Armed Conflict Survey*, Elisabeth Jean Wood and Julia Bleckner explain that state actors are especially likely to engage in conflict-related sexual violence against detained enemy combatants and/or political prisoners, as well as in the context of interrogations. Among rebel groups, sexual violence is committed most commonly by those that rely exclusively on forced recruitment. They may use such violence as part of a strategy designed to build cohesion among their members.

The *Armed Conflict Survey 2017* provides data and analysis on the military, political and humanitarian dimensions of the world's armed conflicts. It includes maps, infographics and our highly regarded *Chart of Conflict* to illustrate key trends, as well as thematic essays by some of the world's leading experts on conflict.