Opportunities for peace and risk scenarios for 2015
“Opportunities for peace and risk scenarios” is an annual publication linked to the yearbook Alert! Report on Conflicts, Human Rights and Peacebuilding, which identifies and analyses scenarios and issues on the international agenda that may enable peacebuilding or lead to an increase in violence and instability in the short or medium term. For more information on the contexts studied, see the ECP Database on Conflict and Peacebuilding.
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- Gender agenda: In 2015, the review of the Beijing Platform for Action, Resolution 1325 and the Millennium Development Goals may provide an opportunity for moving towards stronger and more substantive engagement with genuine sustainable development in which gender equality, the empowerment of women and peacebuilding are key elements.

- Child recruits: The current confluence of efforts at multiple levels to prevent and reduce the recruitment and use of boy and girl soldiers through arranged mechanisms like action plans with governments and armed opposition groups and global awareness initiatives, among other aspects, could mean progress in 2015 and the years to come, despite the many obstacles.

- Post-2015 violence: A consensus has been forged in recent years on the need to include the reduction of armed violence in the new development agenda that will replace the Millennium Development Goals, which the states will begin to discuss in 2015. This is a historic opportunity that places this issue at the centre of debate in the international community and forces the states to mobilise resources and take concrete and quantifiable measures.

- Nuclear negotiations: Iran and the P5+1 countries (the USA, China, Russia, the UK, France and Germany) have until mid-2015 to reach an agreement on the Islamic Republic’s nuclear programme. The negotiations in 2014 showed important differences between the parties, but also yielded significant progress. The dialogue could lead to a historic agreement, but it must first surmount many obstacles, including the fears of power groups in the USA and Iran.

- Sudan: Different steps were taken throughout 2014 to assemble a national dialogue involving various social, political and military players to comprehensively address the internal problems and conflicts affecting the country. This could be one of the main chances for peacebuilding in the complex Sudanese arena in recent years.
Risk Scenarios for 2015

Libya: Three years after the fall of Muammar Gaddafi, the situation in the country is characterised by severe polarisation, the formation of parallel governments, the influence of regional rivalries and the intensification of clashes between armed groups of various stripes, with a serious impact on the civilian population. These dynamics and the difficulty in promoting opportunities for dialogue suggest that the country will remain a source of instability in 2015.

ISIS: The jihadist group is seen as a major threat to stability in the Middle East after a rapid rise in 2014 that has had grave consequences for the civilian population and has called the territorial integrity of Iraq and Syria into question. ISIS is forcing regional and international powers to make new strategic calculations amidst dilemmas on how to address a complex phenomenon that goes beyond military challenges.

Xinjiang: In recent years, and especially in 2014, an unprecedented rise in violence has been reported in Xinjiang, making it the main threat to national security and political and economic stability in China. The situation may worsen in the future due to Beijing’s militarisation of the conflict and the enhanced combat abilities of armed Uyghur organisations.

Pakistan: Provincial capitals, and especially Peshawar, Quetta and Karachi, are being seriously affected by violence and run the risk of turning into a scenario of increasingly serious and fatal attacks, including militarisation, with serious consequences for the civilian population.

Kenya: Launched in 2011 to curb the threat of the Islamist Somali group al-Shabaab and prevent its activities from expanding, Kenya’s military operation in Somalia has prompted increasing attacks by al-Shabaab and allied groups in Kenya, a controversial antiterrorism policy in Nairobi and worsening intercommunal tensions –issues that may have even more serious consequences in the near future.

Haiti: Both the protests and the political and institutional crisis that struck Haiti in 2014 could worsen in early 2015 as the term of the bicameral Parliament expires on 12 January, opening the door for Martelly to govern by decree. Given the situation, the opposition has announced its intention to call massive and continuous protests and the international community has expressed its fear of outbreaks of violence.

Ukraine: The reinforcement of armed groups in 2014, the antagonism between the parties, the ambivalence concerning implementation of the agreements reached, Russia’s support for the insurgency and the serious international crisis between Russia and the West, among other factors, presage worrying scenarios in 2015, with the continuation of armed violence and even a worsening and extension of the conflict and its battlefronts.
Opportunities for Peace in 2015

Negotiations over the Iranian nuclear dossier: a renewed commitment to dialogue

Sudan’s National Dialogue, one of the last hopes for peace in the country

The inclusion of the reduction of armed violence in the Post-2015 Agenda

The confluence of global efforts against child recruitment

Integrating peace and development: progress on the international agenda for gender equality
Negotiations over the Iranian nuclear dossier: a renewed commitment to dialogue

In late 2013, Iran and the group of international powers known as the P5+1 (the USA, China, Russia, the UK, France and Germany) reached an unprecedented agreement to start negotiations over Iran’s nuclear programme. The Joint Plan of Action raised expectations about the possibilities of resolving a thorny issue that has been on the international agenda for years through a historic agreement to assist the normalisation of relations between Iran and the West, and especially the United States. The terms of the plan envisaged that the parties reach an agreement within one year maximum, but that did not come to pass. The day that the self-imposed deadline expired, 24 November 2014, Iran and the P5+1 countries had to admit that there were still great disagreements between them. However, the negotiators stressed that significant progress had also been made, making it worthwhile to remain committed to the dialogue. Thus, a seven-month extension to the negotiations was agreed, consisting of two phases. Both parties have until 1 March 2015 to bring their positions closer together and define a political agreement, and until 1 July to achieve a comprehensive agreement, including an implementation plan. This agreement could have important implications not only for the nuclear non-proliferation system, but also for international and regional politics and relations between the United States and Iran. During this time period, however, many more obstacles will likely have to be overcome than were reported in the first year of negotiations.

Talks over the Iranian nuclear issue began in early 2014. In the first stage of the meetings, some of the dynamics of previous negotiations were maintained, characterised by maximalist approaches, mutual accusations and misperceptions regarding the weaknesses of the other party and the weight of domestic narratives and pressures. Nevertheless, the representatives of Iran and the P5+1 managed to advance and reconcile stances on technical issues amidst a succession of multilateral diplomatic meetings and more discreet bilateral negotiations between Iran and the United States (which were also more effective, according to some analysts) in cities such as Vienna, Geneva and Muscat (Oman). As the November deadline approached, it became apparent that the main points of disagreement focused on two issues. The first was the size and scope of Iran’s uranium enrichment programme (the abilities it could keep and those which should be dismantled as part of an agreement) and the second was the sequence for lifting the sanctions imposed on the Tehran regime (in exchange for the agreement and its concessions, Iran wants a complete and rapid removal of the sanctions, while the P5+1 countries propose a suspension and then a phaseout, depending on implementation of the agreement). While the talks, only a few details of which have become public, have centred around various technical aspects, the basis of the discussion (and the solution) is political. For Iran the nuclear issue is a matter of national dignity that implies rejecting the dictates of the West. As a signatory to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), Tehran insists that it has the right to pursue peaceful atomic activities and provides transparency (inspections, access to facilities) in exchange for keeping aspects of its nuclear plan and research programmes. The P5+1, and particularly the Western countries, want to limit Iran’s abilities as much as possible to prevent any chance that the Iranian nuclear programme may acquire a military dimension.

The failure to reach an agreement within the established timeframe caused some disappointment, but there were also several positive assessments of the progress made, lessons learned after a year of dialogue and prospects for an agreement in the months of negotiations ahead. The parties underscored that progress had been made on subjects that initially seemed intractable and deeper knowledge had been acquired of the other party, its internal constraints and room for manoeuvre. The negotiations over the Iranian nuclear issue also enabled the establishment of an unprecedented channel of communication between senior officials in Washington and Tehran, despite their historical animosity. While this rapprochement was seen publicly in the telephone conversation between US President Barack Obama and the recently elected Iranian leader, Hassan Rouhani in 2013, it took shape over the course of various meetings in 2014 between John Kerry and Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif (some alone and others with the chief of European diplomacy at the time, Catherine Ashton) and in smooth telephone conversations between members of the negotiating delegations. Ashton also travelled to Tehran in the first trip to Iran made by a senior EU diplomat in six years.

Notably, the path of diplomatic dialogue about the Iranian nuclear dossier was maintained, despite the many contingencies that could have hindered its development, such as tensions between Russia and the West stemming from the crisis in Ukraine, for example, or the legislative elections in the United States in November, which was a significant setback for Obama’s Democratic Party (and which led to some scepticism among the Iranian delegation about any deals that Washington could propose). Specialised analysts pointed out that negotiations to regulate such complex issues usually last more than a year. Thus, the extension of the talks has been seen as a sign of trust that it is still a credible pathway. Meanwhile, the deal is still alive that allowed the talks to begin, bringing benefits to both parties. For the P5+1, this means that Tehran has put a freeze on its atomic activities (the IAEA has certified that Iran has fulfilled its promises in

01. Consisting of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany, this group of countries is also known as the EU3+3.
this regard), while Iran enjoys a partial lifting of the sanctions, giving it a little room to breathe economically.

In the current scenario, various factors could help the parties to achieve an agreement and act as an incentive. For the time being, the leadership of both Iran and the USA are committed to the search for a negotiated solution. Obama has invested significant political capital in rapprochement with Washington’s traditional enemy. After his party’s defeat in the elections in November, Obama wrote his fourth letter to the Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, urging him not to miss the opportunity to make a deal. Obama only has so much time (his term ends in 2016) to try to reach an agreement that would become the distinctive seal of his foreign policy legacy, a sphere in which he has not had much success. Rouhani, the former Iranian nuclear negotiator from 2003 to 2005, has focused his efforts on the nuclear dossier, aware that any economic recovery, one of the main issues facing Iran, would require an agreement resulting in lifting the sanctions. Various public opinion studies reveal that Rouhani’s commitment to negotiations has the backing of most of the Iranian populace, which is open to making some concessions and adopting measures that enable it to normalise relations with the USA. Thus, some analysts have said that the hope for change represented by Rouhani and his focus on a nuclear deal goes hand in hand with the need for change in the regime, as more than two-thirds of the population was born after the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

In addition, the evolution of the conflicts in the Middle East, and particularly the rise of the radical Sunni Islamic State (ISIS), has shown an unusual confluence of interests between the United States and Iran. Despite their differences in other areas, like the war in Syria (Iran remains steadfast in its support for Bashar Assad’s government), in practice Tehran and Washington have become allies in the fight against ISIS, identified as a common enemy. Senior leaders from both countries have addressed the issue, and Obama insinuated as much in his letter to Khamenei. A possible agreement that resolves the atomic dispute could promote or open avenues of understanding between Tehran and the West in other areas, based on the understanding that Iran is an inevitable regional power in the current context, with a special ability to influence developments in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. One of the most stable countries in the region, it has the resources and willingness to intervene in the region to stop the rise of radical Sunni armed groups. Europe is not only interested in promoting pathways to stabilise the Middle East, but could also be interested in lifting sanctions on Iran for the purpose of diversifying its sources of energy supply given its tensions with Russia. Meanwhile, Moscow could leverage its relations through agreements with Iran as an asset in its dispute with the West, aware that it could defy the sanctions and that it has great influence in areas that could be of assistance in resolving the nuclear issue. Although some observers viewed the recent agreement between Russia and Iran to provide reactors to the Bushehr plant as evidence of this, others stressed that the deal fits the argument promoted by the P5+1 in the negotiations to reduce Tehran’s needs to produce atomic energy within its borders.

Despite some encouraging signs, it is clear that the negotiations and possibilities of an agreement over Iran’s nuclear programme are also threatened by several factors. The extension of the dialogue exposes it to the influence of hardliners on both sides, which have expressed their scepticism from the start, if not open rejection, and are willing to boycott it. On the Iranian side, powerful sectors, such as the top brass of the Republic Guard, have openly questioned it, although they lowered the tone of their criticism after an appeal from Ayatollah Khamenei. The supreme Iranian Leader, who has the final say on nuclear policy, has asked to give the negotiations a chance, but has also adopted a cautious and suspicious attitude towards the intentions of the United States and its Western allies.

In the United States, the victory of the opposition Republican Party in the recent elections, which furthered its majority in the House of Representatives and will control the Senate in January for the first time since 2007, will not only reduce Obama’s room for manoeuvre, but will also increase the odds that unilateral sanctions will be promoted against Iran. This would contravene the agreements necessary for the negotiations to begin, weaken the Iranian leadership that promoted the talks, lead to a resumption of Iran’s nuclear activities that have been frozen so far and create divisions within the P5+1. For this reason, various analysts have warned of the strategic cost of a measure of this kind, since the United States could be held accountable, even by some of its partners, for setting off an escalation and increasing the possibilities of violent confrontation. Polls also indicate that the US population supports diplomatic negotiation to address the nuclear issue over any alternatives.

However, the Israeli government has been fiercely opposed to the negotiations from the start. At any time, the Israeli government could choose to attack Iran’s nuclear facilities

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directly (in August Tehran claimed that it had shot down an Israeli drone flying over the Natanz nuclear complex). Israel has adopted this policy in the past, when it attacked the Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq in 1981, and when it conducted another strike in Syria in 2007, in order to guarantee its position as the sole nuclear power in the region. Israel, which unlike Iran has not signed the NPT, pursues a policy of nuclear “ambiguity”, neither confirming nor denying whether it possesses nuclear arsenals. The Israeli government’s position could be influenced by the upcoming Knesset elections in March, but overall the policies promoted by Netanyahu have isolated Israel internationally, thus limiting its ability to mobilise against Iran. Meanwhile, it must be borne in mind that developments in the conflicts in Iraq and Syria may have implications for the nuclear negotiations, although for the first year the negotiating parties managed to hold the talks in safety, despite the regional turmoil.

The coming months will show whether cooperation and the search for consensus will prevail over confrontation. What is certain is that any achievement would require both parties to be flexible and to make difficult concessions, with political costs among their respective domestic audiences. Any agreement would therefore require education about its advantages, stressing the risks involved in scenarios other than a negotiated solution. A positive outcome could strengthen the nuclear weapon non-proliferation system in an especially tumultuous zone, help to bury a dispute that has affected Iran’s international relations for decades, facilitate some normalisation between Washington and Tehran and create a scenario that could aid collaboration between regional and international powers in efforts to stabilise the Middle East. The timeframe is limited. Iran and the P5+1 have the first quarter of 2015 to grasp this opportunity for peace —or to let it slip away.
Sudan’s National Dialogue, one of the last hopes for peace in the country

The history of Sudan has been marked by a nearly constant atmosphere of violence and instability. Over the course of the last 50 years, the marginalised peripheries of the country have confronted a predatory client state in an attempt to halt the inequality and exclusion that has characterised the country since its independence. The construction of this state, based on the Arabic cultural assimilation of the non-Arab periphery through repression and violence to ensure its dominance by extracting resources from the marginal areas, provided structural conditions and provided political and economic reasons for various insurgencies to appear. Three years after losing one-fourth of its population and territory as a result of the secession of South Sudan in 2011 after more than 20 years of war, Sudan remains immersed in violence because it has not dealt with the deep causes of this instability. According to some analysts, for several years there has been growing agreement that resolving the different domestic conflicts facing the country (from Darfur, which goes back more than a decade, to South Kordofan and Blue Nile, in addition to pressure from the political opposition and various attempted coups d’état carried out by parts of the Sudanese Army) would require a global approach, instead of the failed individualised treatment of the government of Omar al-Bashir in an attempt to remain in power. Whether due to internal influence, international pressure (especially from the United States and the European Union), political calculations or the conviction that it is the only way out of the Sudanese labyrinth, on 27 January 2014 President Omar al-Bashir called on the political parties and the insurgencies to commit to the National Dialogue process to build peace in the country and discuss possible constitutional reform, which some analysts believe could be one of the best opportunities for peacebuilding in the country in recent years. The international community and internal political opposition hailed the proposal, though the insurgents regarded it with scepticism. The main points of his appeal were national unity and peace, the economy, basic freedoms and rights, national identity and governance and constitutional reform.

The National Dialogue is an initiative coordinated on the technical level by a committee in charge of organising the process, known as the 7+7 Committee, which takes its name from the number of members composing it: seven from the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) and seven from opposition parties. Nevertheless, the initiative displayed great fragility from the beginning. First, the process was delayed many times and events on the ground are not consistent with the good intentions and declarations of the president of the country.6 The pressure on the media, the restrictions of political parties’ freedoms and the ongoing wars in Darfur and in South Kordofan and Blue Nile are a sign of this. At mid-year, a political advisor and member of the NCP’s inner circle, Qutbi al-Mahdi, announced that the National Dialogue would include civil society organisations, women’s groups, students, workers and national figures, but no concrete initiative for inclusive participation in it has been made public thus far.

However, from the start the coalition National Consensus Forces (NCF), which unites the main opposition parties, stated that it would not participate in the National Dialogue unless the government puts an end to the various wars affecting the country and creates an environment favourable to holding talks after two of its main parties said they were willing to participate, the Popular Congress Party (PCP) and the National Umma Party (NUP). The PCP, headed by its historical leader Hassan al-Turabi, expressed its readiness to participate in the initiative, dividing the opposition bloc. The initiative was stalled for various months, especially after the arrest on 17 May of another opposition leader, Sadiq al-Mahdi of the NUP, also a member of the NCF. His arrest prompted his party to announce it was suspending meetings to participate in the National Dialogue. Al-Mahdi was arrested because of his harsh criticism of the government’s Rapid Support Forces (RSF) for crimes and atrocities committed in the conflict zones. However, one month later he was released due to the negative impact surrounding the arrest of an opposition leader and because the central committee of the NUP, hoping to regain lost confidence, expressed its support for the Sudanese Armed Forces and said that al-Mahdi’s statements regarding the RSF could come from information that “may not be entirely true”.7 Despite the setbacks and following months of deadlock, the 7+7 Committee unveiled the road map of the National Dialogue on 8 August, establishing that it would begin in September and last three months. This timeframe was not respected, however, as the National Dialogue has yet to start.

Nevertheless, the insurgency and political opposition have expressed their willingness to move forward with the process. The National Dialogue was given significant impetus in August, when the NUP and armed opposition coalition Sudan

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6. Some analysts expressed scepticism about the lack of progress in the process, which they described as a “monologue” by the ruling party. See Copnall, James, “Sudan: is the National Dialogue really dead? (And did it ever really exist anyway?)” African Arguments, 25 June 2014.
Revolutionary Front (SRF)\(^9\) signed the Paris Declaration,\(^9\) by which the SRF pledged to observe a unilateral two-month ceasefire, make the effort necessary to end the war and start talks with all political forces leading to the formation of a transition government and more democracy. SRF leader Malik Agar said that both groups had agreed to join political forces and work for a broad dialogue to preserve the unity of the country (in reference to South Sudan). They also agreed to boycott the general elections in April 2015 unless they are organised by an inclusive transition government. The remaining parties welcomed the declaration. Al-Bashir said that the National Dialogue only required three months, which is why he had announced that the 2015 elections would not be postponed, since according to him that would create a constitutional vacuum. He also said that a transition government would not be established and that the National Dialogue would start on 25 November. The Paris Declaration, which was sponsored by the African Union High Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) on 4 September, helped the SRF, NUP and 7+7 Committee to sign a statement in Addis Ababa about their participation in the National Dialogue with the facilitation of the AUHIP, ending months of stalemate in the process. Although al-Bashir rejected the Paris Declaration, he welcomed the signing of the agreement in Addis Ababa by the same groups that participated in Paris and the 7+7 Committee.\(^10\) The members of the Troika (the United States, United Kingdom and Norway)\(^11\) hailed these efforts and backed the AU in its initiatives and positioning.

The first meeting of the general assembly to prepare for the National Dialogue was held on 2 November and presided over by Omar al-Bashir. Around 100 political players and members of political parties participated in the assembly, which approved the report of the 7+7 Committee (the road map for the National Dialogue) and the Addis Ababa agreement signed on 4 September, as well as plans to agree on a timetable for the National Dialogue. Other important parties like the Reform Now Movement (RNM), led by Ghazi Salah al-Din Attabani, also participated in the meeting. Various subcommittees for preparing the National Dialogue started to hold meetings and gather ideas.

Meanwhile, even though a significant push was given to the peace processes in Darfur and South Kordofan and Blue Nile in November, with parallel meetings held in Addis Ababa, no agreement was reached due to al-Bashir’s refusal to take a sweeping approach to resolve the conflicts in the country, as requested by the armed groups. Nevertheless, al-Bashir repeated his call for the armed groups to join the dialogue process. Thus far, the Sudanese government had kept its negotiations with the Two Areas (as the peace process in South Kordofan and Blue Nile is known) and Darfur separate from the National Dialogue, while the SPLM-N wanted to include aspects of the National Dialogue (the Paris Declaration) in it and bring the Darfur peace process under a single peace process coordinating both lines of negotiation and leading to the National Dialogue.

Even though the National Dialogue is proceeding slowly and no agreement has been achieved in Darfur or the Two Areas enabling the involvement of armed groups in it, the fact that the AUHIP is bringing these processes together\(^12\) and coordinating them so they may be united with the National Dialogue means that the African Union understands a comprehensive approach is essential and wants to move the negotiations in that direction. However, al-Bashir refuses to accept the convergence of the National Dialogue with efforts to resolve the armed conflicts in Sudan.\(^13\) Led by Thabo Mbeki, the AUHIP has urged the 7+7 Committee to persuade the armed groups to join the National Dialogue and supports all mediation efforts moving in the same direction.\(^14\) Chadian President Idriss Déby also encouraged former allies of his, armed groups from Darfur, to participate in the process. The German government and Berghoff Foundation did the same, holding a seminar in Berlin in October after the SRF announced plans to form a strategic alliance with the opposition bloc NCF and other opposition parties. Internationally, there is a clear desire to support the process, as the European Union has demonstrated on many occasions, such as when it announced its promise to forgive Sudan’s foreign debt if the process reached its stated objectives. Even if the initiative fails, meaning that a negotiating process takes place that is not inclusive and does not resolve the conflicts in the country due to the slow progress of the National Dialogue, the complexity and number of groups involved, the accumulation of mistrust between the parties and the persisting violence on the ground, it can be said that the beginning of a process of change is now under way.

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\(^{08}\) Supporting a comprehensive approach to the Sudanese conflict, in November 2011 an opposition coalition was created, the SRF, bringing together the SLA-AW, SLA-MM and JEM, the three main armed groups in Darfur that have still not signed the DDPD agreement, and the SPLM-N, active in South Kordofan and Blue Nile. See McCutchen, Andrew, *The Sudan Revolutionary Front: Its Formation and Development*, Small Arms Survey, October 2014.


\(^{10}\) Sudan Tribune, “Bashir reiterates rejection of Paris Declaration, but welcomes Addis Ababa deal”, 2 November 2014.

\(^{11}\) The United States, the United Kingdom and Norway form what is known as the Sudan Troika, a group whose governments backed the peace negotiations between Sudan and South Sudan that led to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005.


\(^{13}\) On 3 December, the “Sudan Call” was signed in Addis Ababa between the leader of the NCF coalition, Farouk Abu Issa, the vice president of the armed SRF coalition, Minni Minawi, the head of the NUP, al-Sadiq al Mahdi, and the chief of the Alliance of Sudanese Civil Society Organisations, Amin Maki Madani. This agreement is a call to end the war, dismantle the single-party state, sign a comprehensive agreement and undertake a democratic transition in the country. Al-Bashir has condemned alliances between the political opposition and the insurgency, reasserting that the two conflicts will not be negotiated in the same forum, as the insurgencies would like. See Sudan Tribune, “Sudan’s Bashir vows to quash rebellion by the end of the year”, Sudan Tribune, 13 December 2014.

The inclusion of the reduction of armed violence in the Post-2015 Agenda

Throughout 2015, states will formally start negotiations to define the new development agenda, known as the Post-2015 Agenda, which will replace the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agreed in the year 2000. Although the Millennium Declaration in 2000 addressed issues of peace, security and disarmament, they were not subsequently included directly or specifically in the MDGs. In recent years, various initiatives and reports produced by international organisations, governments and NGOs have been fuelling a growing consensus about the need to explicitly include the prevention and reduction of armed violence and the promotion of security in the Post-2015 Agenda. Despite all the political and methodological criticism that accompanied the design and follow-up of the MDGs, most agree on the point that the explicit inclusion of the reduction of armed violence in the Post-2015 Agenda would be a historic opportunity by situating such a sensitive issue at the centre of the debate and of the international community’s efforts while forcing states to mobilise resources and make agreements to adopt concrete and quantifiable strategies and measures to achieve the goals finally agreed.

Armed violence is currently estimated to kill around 740,000 people each year, of which only around one-third may be attributed to armed conflicts and preventable diseases affecting vulnerable people in war zones. Furthermore, each year 500,000 to 750,000 people are injured in contexts other than armed conflicts and 51.2 million people had been forcibly displaced by the end of 2013 (16.7 million refugees, 33.3 million displaced persons and 1.2 million asylum seekers). Other reports calculate that around 1.5 billion people live in contexts of fragility, armed conflict or large-scale organised crime.

Beyond the direct impact of armed conflict, several reports have established a clear connection between violence and development, as well as between violence and many variables (rates of poverty, income inequality, unemployment, illiteracy, infant mortality, lack of access to healthcare and education, etc.). According to the World Bank’s World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Violence and Development (p. 5), “People in fragile and conflict-affected states are more than twice as likely to be undernourished as those in other developing countries, more than three times as likely to be unable to send their children to school, twice as likely to see their children die before age five and more than twice as likely to lack clean water. On average, a country that experienced major violence over the period from 1981 to 2005 has a poverty rate 21 percentage points higher than a country that saw no violence” (WDR 2011, p. 5). Both the UNPD and the Geneva Declaration, for example, have indicated that no country affected by high levels of violence has managed to achieve even one MDG while various reports by the Geneva Declaration and other centres show a clear correlation between levels of violence and seven of the eight MDGs. According to the World Bank, the average cost of a war is equivalent to 30 years of growth of the GDP of a medium-sized developing country. Violence has an obvious effect on the macroeconomic level (lower levels of investment and savings, brain drain and capital flight, migration and forced displacement, interrupted economic activity, damaged infrastructure, rise in the prices of staple products, etc.), but also on the microeconomic one (less productivity and less participation in the labour market, for example), which directly affects the state’s ability to fulfil some of its main obligations, such as the guarantee of security and basic services and the redistribution of wealth. In addition, high levels of violence often lead to significant expenditure of public funds on issues that do not directly affect the population’s welfare.

Given this situation, in the last 10 years a series of initiatives and efforts have been undertaken to create consensus on including the reduction and prevention of armed violence in the Post-2015 Agenda. Notable among them has been the consensus approval of the UN General Assembly’s resolution on “Promoting development through the reduction and prevention of armed violence” in 2008, which urged the Secretary-General to explore the views of member states regarding the interrelations between armed violence and development, as well as the Secretary-General’s subsequent report bearing

20. World Bank, op. cit.
the same title, which was published in November 2009. This report acknowledged that armed violence is a clear obstacle to development and to attaining the MDGs and also made a series of recommendations, including the design of goals, targets and indicators for measuring the reduction of armed violence. Both the UN General Assembly’s resolution and the Secretary-General’s report, as well as many of the initiatives developed afterwards, originally emerged through the impetus of the Geneva Declaration, a document initially adopted by 42 states at a ministerial summit organised by the UNDP and the Swiss government in June 2006 that has currently been signed by more than 100. The initiative achieved an important consensus between states, NGOs and the donor community to significantly reduce levels of armed violence in 2015 and beyond. Another significant initiative was the Conference on Armed Violence held in Geneva under the auspices of the Norwegian government, where more than 60 countries signed the “Oslo Commitments”, pledging to include measures to prevent and reduce armed violence in their strategies to achieve the MDGs. Also in 2010, representatives of many different governments met in Timor-Leste and approved the Dili Declaration, which identifies seven targets for peacebuilding and statebuilding and outlines specific commitments for governments and the donor community.\textsuperscript{21} Later, in November 2010, many countries and the donor community approved the document \textit{New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States}, in which the signatories pledged to work to include five peacebuilding and statebuilding goals in the Post-2015 Agenda.\textsuperscript{22}

More specifically with regard to the process of reflection on the definition of a global development agenda after 2015, the UN Secretary-General promoted various initiatives to achieve the greatest possible consensus between member states and civil society.\textsuperscript{23} The subjects of peace, security and armed violence are explicitly addressed in some of these preparatory efforts and the documents to be used as a basis for negotiations between states, which will be developed in 2015. First is the report created in 2012 by the United Nations System Task Team, \textit{Realising the future we want for all},\textsuperscript{24} which identified “peace and security” as one of the four interdependent dimensions upon which the entire development agenda should be articulated beyond 2015. Second, the report issued in 2013 by the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons and entitled \textit{A New Global Partnership to Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development} indicated that the new universal development agenda should drive five major changes, one of which was to “build peace and effective, open and accountable institutions for all”, stating that “freedom from fear, conflict and violence is the most fundamental human right and the essential foundation for building peaceful and prosperous societies”. This report also proposed targets and goals that, according to some analysts, might be adopted in the end in the Post-2015 Agenda.\textsuperscript{25} Third, one of the 11 global thematic consultations led by the United Nations was on considering the reduction of violence a priority for the international community beyond 2015.

Despite the consensus on the need to include issues related to peace, insecurity, conflict and violence in the Post-2015 Agenda, some political and methodological challenges and dilemmas regarding operationalisation and precision remain. Prominent in the political arena is the eminently political nature of many phenomena that give rise to armed violence and insecurity, the management of which many states view as one of their core areas of sovereignty. Therefore, they are reluctant to agree on strategies involving the observational capacities of the international community. Historically, states have been opposed to third-party intervention in managing and resolving armed conflicts, which is viewed as tacit political acknowledgement of the groups conducting the armed struggle and especially acceptance that the state (with its legal and economic instruments and means of enforcement) is unable to resolve a conflict. In fact, the steadfast opposition of many states to any form of foreign interference in what they consider to be domestic affairs was notable in the long discussion that led to the birth of the “Right to Protect” concept. Thus, some experts have opined that the inclusion of politically sensitive issues (such as armed conflict or state fragility) in the Post-2015 Agenda could undermine the consensus that could help to reduce violence or struggle against insecurity.

In this sense, another dilemma with which the states must deal is whether to approach topics linked to “peace and security” comprehensively or in isolation. While

\textsuperscript{21} These targets include: a) strengthening agreements, processes and inclusive political dialogue; b) establishing and strengthening basic security; c) achieving the peaceful resolution of conflicts and access to justice; d) developing effective and accountable government institutions to facilitate the peaceful resolution of conflicts; e) creating the foundation for inclusive economic development, including sustainable livelihoods, employment and the effective management of natural resources; f) developing social skills for reconciliation and peaceful coexistence; and g) strengthening regional stability and cooperation.

\textsuperscript{22} The five goals are: a) legitimate politics – foster inclusive political settlements and conflict resolution; b) security – establish and strengthen people’s security; c) justice – address injustices and increase people’s access to justice; d) economic foundations – generate employment and improve livelihoods; and e) revenues and services – manage revenue and build capacity for accountable and fair service delivery.

\textsuperscript{23} See the United Nations System Task Team on the UN Post-2015 Agenda (created in January 2012 in order to bring analysis and technical and analytical knowledge to the discussion about the Post-2015 Agenda, it brings together over 60 UN organisations and agencies and other international organisations); the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons; the Special Advisor on Post-2015 Development Planning; the national consultations that have been held in 88 countries; and the 11 global thematic consultations, as well as a participatory process in which anyone can share their views on the priorities for development in the Post-2015 Agenda.


\textsuperscript{25} The goal would be to “ensure stable and peaceful societies” and the targets would be to: a) reduce by x the violent deaths per 10,000 people and eliminate all forms of violence against children; b) ensure that institutions of justice are accessible, independent, equipped with sufficient resources and respectful of the rights of due process; c) curb factors of external tension that lead to conflicts, including those related to organised crime; and d) improve the capacity, professionalism and accountability of security forces, the police and the judiciary.
most experts agree on the appropriateness of creating a global and multidimensional objective to include goals that specifically address each aspect of violence and insecurity, what is clear is that the nature and management strategies of phenomena such as armed conflict, organised crime, common crime, intra-household violence, forced displacement, child recruitment and terrorist attacks differ widely. Moreover, several experts have warned that even if agreement on a global “peace and security” objective is reached, the structural nature of the causes of armed conflicts, violence and insecurity (such as poor governance, inequality or social exclusion) advise and make it inevitable that some of these structural causes cover targets and indicators included in other objectives. As for the universal character of the objective in question, most analysts indicate that violence is a phenomenon affecting every country in the world, and as a result the objective, targets and indicators must be global and shared, but the times and strategies for achieving those objectives and targets must take into consideration the specific aspects and capacities of each state.

Beyond the criticism, dilemmas, problems and resistance that could be prompted by including the reduction of armed violence in the Post-2015 Agenda, most analysts indicate that it provides a historic opportunity. Even though armed violence causes hundreds of thousands of direct and indirect victims each year, the management of issues such as violence and insecurity have traditionally been considered the internal affairs of states. Thus, the many initiatives and publications launched in recent years to include violence and insecurity in the Post-2015 Agenda have not stressed questioning states’ legitimacy and capacity to deal with these phenomena, but rather have linked high levels of violence to low abilities to reach sustainable rates of development and attain the MDGs. In this sense, World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Violence and Development (p. 1) says that “while much of the world has made rapid progress in reducing poverty in the past 60 years, areas characterised by repeated cycles of political and criminal violence are being left far behind, their economic growth compromised and their human indicators stagnant”. The link between violence and development, however, could prevent or temper the suspicions of some states fearful of ceding national sovereignty or facilitating new forms of interference in their internal affairs, and thereby encourages the international community to struggle together against violence.
The confluence of global efforts against child recruitment

The recruitment of children continues to be a serious problem around the world and a prevalent practice among armed groups, governments and opposition forces in conflict. In 2013, the United Nations documented over 4,000 cases of recruitment and use of children and estimated that the real number was much higher, and in 2014 at least 57 armed groups in 15 countries in conflict recruited or used children, according to the latest report by the UN Secretary-General on childhood and armed conflicts.26 Boy and girl recruits perform many functions, including combat, message delivery, logistics, cooking, transport and sexual slavery. Whether forced or voluntary, their participation in armed groups has a serious impact on their physical and emotional wellbeing, including abuse, sexual violence and long-term psychosocial damage. There are also specific impacts on gender. International human rights law sets the minimum age for recruitment and participation in combat at 18 and international humanitarian law bans the recruitment and use of children under the age of 15, which is stipulated as a war crime by the International Criminal Court. Given this extremely serious situation, various players aimed at fighting and preventing the use of boys and girls by armed groups have increased their efforts on different levels in recent years, making the problem more visible and putting practical measures in motion. Thus, in 2014 a host of initiatives came together to give fresh impetus to the issue. Prominent among these initiatives was the United Nations campaign backed by the UN Security Council addressed to governments that recruit children; agreement on new UN action plans with parties in conflict; other ad hoc mechanisms aimed at armed opposition groups; and initiatives from regional stakeholders. These efforts could pay dividends in 2015 and for years to come in terms of new releases of minors, a greater commitment from armed actors to obey the child recruitment ban, the empowerment of civil society groups in this field and greater awareness of the problem in the international peace and security agenda. However, to the extent that child soldiers are used in armed actors’ strategies, the obstacles only grow.

Standing out in this tide of local and international efforts is the United Nations global campaign “Children, not soldiers” (a title using more inclusive language from a gender perspective), launched in March 2014, which aspires to end the recruitment and use of minors by the security forces of governments involved in armed conflict.27 The UN Security Council’s adoption of its objectives (Resolution 2134 (2014)) broadens its scope. In practical terms, the campaign plans to create road maps with eight governments that have already signed action plans with the UN (Afghanistan, Chad, South Sudan, Myanmar, Somalia and DR Congo) or that have shown a willingness to do so (Yemen, which finally signed an action plan in May 2014, and Sudan). In consultation with the governments, the road maps will indicate priorities, challenges, benchmarks and timelines. While there is a clear risk of default, it will come at the cost of breaching an explicit and voluntary commitment. And at the additional risk of countries whitewashing their image and continuing with policies that seriously violate human rights in many areas, the campaign and mechanisms provided are themselves a practical and pragmatic tool for making concrete progress in an area that affects a vulnerable group, that of children and child recruits, which is already a significant improvement over previous periods.

Another arena of international effort has been the action plans between the UN and parties in conflict, whether governments or armed opposition groups, that appear in the annual reports of the UN Secretary-General as actors that serious violate children’s rights. In late 2014, there were 23 action plans signed between the UN and parties in conflict (11 state forces and 12 non-state forces, covering 14 countries), of which nine had already been implemented and completed, with the actors implicated being removed from the lists of the annual report. The oldest action plan dates to 2005 (with Forces Nouvelles, of Côte d’Ivoire, which has already been implemented, removing its leaders from the list like other players with actions plans in the country). The action plans have been adopted at a slow but steady rate, with four new signatories in 2011, three in 2012, the renewal of a previous one in 2013 and a new plan for Yemen in 2014. As such, it is slow and long-term work that has achieved some positive results (new signatories and cases of complete implementation and removal from the lists). The action plans cover matters such as the issuance of orders to ban child recruitment, the investigation and prosecution of those responsible for child recruitment, the release of children identified in armed groups, authorised and unobstructed access to military camps and bases to verify that there are no minors among the groups and many other measures that vary depending on each case. The action plans include concrete steps and specific timelines.

The instruments led by the UN, whether addressed to governments or to both governmental and non-governmental forces, are accompanied by other complementary initiatives promoted by civil society and regional stakeholders aimed at achieving commitments and concrete measures and at enhancing awareness and visibility of the issue of child soldiers. The main example from civil society is the Deed of Commitment mechanism from the NGO Geneva Call, which promotes the observation of humanitarian norms by non-governmental armed groups through verifiable public commitments. This tool takes shape when a Deed of Commitment is signed by

27. For more detailed information about the campaign, see https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/children-not-soldiers/.
the armed opposition group, Geneva Call and the government of the Republic and Canton of Geneva. In addition to the Deed of Commitment for Adherence to a Total Ban on Anti-Personnel Mines and for Cooperation in Mine Action and the Deed of Commitment for the Prohibition of Sexual Violence in Situations of Armed Conflict and towards the Elimination of Gender Discrimination, Geneva Call promotes a third mechanism, the Deed of Commitment for the Protection of Children from the Effects of Armed Conflict. Among other aspects, their adoption by armed groups includes the promise to ban the use of minors in hostilities, guarantees that they will not recruit minors, whether voluntarily or by force, and pledges to release minors. During 2014, Deeds of Commitment to protect children were signed with the CNA of Myanmar, the YPG and YPJ of the Kurdish parts of Syria and the GPRN/NSCN of northeastern India. Furthermore, two Palestinian factions, the PLO and the Palestinian National Coalition (“Tahaluf”), an umbrella organisation, adopted a declaration committed to the highest standards of child protection, including measures to prevent 18-year-olds from participating in hostilities. Geneva Call plans to continue the dialogue to make progress in implementation. In relation to the armed groups’ positions on child recruitment, the UN Secretary-General highlighted the rise in the number of public statements and orders issued by armed groups banning the recruitment and use of minors.

Efforts from regional organisations also increased, boosting operational efforts against child recruitment and giving the subject more visibility. The African Union’s Peace and Security Department is working together with the Office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, UNICEF and experts to create guidance and bring a child protection perspective to AU policies and activities. Likewise, in March 2012 the European Parliament ratified a statement urging non-state armed groups to commit to ending child recruitment. This statement was adopted after discussions initiated by Geneva Call. The text recommends that the bodies of the European Commission engage with armed opposition groups directly or indirectly (through specialised NGOs or humanitarian organisations) to address the issue of child protection and to urge those groups to sign Geneva Call’s Deeds of Commitment. It also endorses supporting humanitarian organisations that engage with armed groups to promote respect for international humanitarian law.

Despite the coming together of effort on many levels, the many hurdles ahead should temper our optimism. For instance, there are still only a few armed groups involved in active conflicts accused of serious violations of the rights of children that are participating in mechanisms to end child recruitment (of the 57 armed groups accused of recruiting or using minors in 15 countries in conflict, including conflicts not dealt with by the UN Security Council, only five parties had agreed on action plans, according to estimates in May 2014). In other words, armed groups that continue to recruit or use minors for economic, strategic, logistic or military reasons are still in the majority, regardless of whether they are aware of international humanitarian law against doing so. In contexts where armed groups and especially opposition groups try to maximise armed struggle, they may see little incentive to stop recruiting or using children. Added to this are troubling patterns of violence against children in 2014 in places such as Syria, the Central African Republic and Nigeria, among many others, where rather than seek external legitimacy through greater respect for international humanitarian law, armed groups step up their violations of the rights of minors, apparently as a strategy of terror and to maximise human and material resources. Despite the enormous difficulties and challenges, we are witnessing an obvious swell of effort on multiple fronts, including the immense labour of many civil society stakeholders, which boosts the struggle against child recruitment and strives to prevent the recruitment and use of minors and could result in positive new outcomes in 2015 and beyond. This enhanced visibility could also lead to greater importance of the subject of child recruits in the agenda of DDR programmes and peace processes. The obstacles are many, yet the coming together of efforts and initiatives invites the consideration that some clearly necessary progress has been made.

28. For more detailed information on Geneva Call’s Deeds of Commitment, see http://www.genevacall.org/how-we-work/deed-of-commitment/
Integrating peace and development: progress on the international agenda for gender equality

The year 2015 may be decisive for progress in gender equality internationally, due to the coincidence of different events and the possible approval of new instruments that may advance the equity agenda worldwide and represent an endorsement for the women, peace and security agenda that began in 2000. The year 2015 is the deadline set by the United Nations to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and marks the 20th anniversary since the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing in 1995, when the Beijing Platform for Action was signed. Third, it will be the 15th anniversary since the UN Security Council approved Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. All three of these tools will be subject to review in 2015. The timing may be important in giving new impetus to the gender agenda in an international context in which women's rights are seriously threatened by different factors such as the international financial crisis and the growing conservatism of many governments intending to regressively reform international commitments acquired previously, to the detriment of women.\(^{30}\)

With a strong push from women's organisations, the international gender equity agenda has made significant progress since 1995, when the conference in Beijing marked a turning point with the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action. It was certainly the most important moment since 1979, when the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was approved. The platform made a number of strategic objectives to achieve the empowerment of women and improve their living conditions worldwide by achieving gender equality in 12 areas. This conference, which brought together tens of thousands of women worldwide, created unprecedented momentum for the women's movement and served as a springboard for working towards gender equity in the international arena. In 2000, as part of the Millennium Summit, the United Nations adopted the MDGs, which included two explicit gender goals: 1) to promote equality between the sexes and the empowerment of women\(^{31}\) and 2) to improve maternal health. Other objectives were also included that addressed gender issues in their development, such as the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger. Thus, the impetus given by the conference in Beijing also affected the agenda for international development, albeit timidly. Meanwhile, in 2000 the agenda for peace and international security also began the process to integrate a gender perspective by approving UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which later became what is called the women, peace and security agenda. For the first time, the UN Security Council was the arena for discussion on the impact of armed conflict on women and girls and the role that women play in peacebuilding locally and internationally. After the approval of Resolution 1325, six other resolutions have been passed to develop and complete this first one.\(^{32}\)

A process to review these three processes will take place during 2015, first to evaluate the application of the MDGs, the Beijing Platform for Action and Resolution 1325, and second to improve their implementation and in some cases to ratify new instruments, like the new goals that will replace the MDGs. Women's organisations have called for this new development agenda to include gender equity to a larger extent (whose integration into the MDGs was very weak) and for greater integration of the women, peace and security agenda, arguing that peace and security are necessary and essential conditions for development, which cannot be achieved without gender equality. Two parallel processes have been undertaken in preparation for the Post-2015 Agenda: the UN Secretary-General called a High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons to conduct a report with recommendations to create a new agenda\(^{33}\) and agreement was reached on the creation of an open working group to define a set of objectives for sustainable development during the Rio+20 Conference on sustainable development.\(^{34}\) As a result of both processes, two proposals have been presented for objectives to continue the process begun in 2000. Meanwhile, civil society has monitored these processes exhaustively and contributed many proposals.

On the positive side, both official proposals envisage the creation of gender equality as an objective unto itself, the empowerment of women and human rights for women and girls much more ambitiously than in the MDGs, which only focused on the subject of education. The new proposals, which are different but share some points in common, believe that gender equality, the empowerment of women and human rights for women and girls may only be achieved by eliminating discrimination and all forms of violence against them, in addition to eradicating harmful practices such as child marriage, recognising the right of women to own land and guaranteeing equal and effective participation in political, economic and public life. This includes universal access to healthcare, respect for sexual and reproductive rights and


\(^{31}\) This objective resulted in the following goal: “Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015”.


lower child mortality. The Rio+20 proposal also explicitly refers to unpaid work and domestic work. Thus, the dimension of gender has become much more relevant than before, showing that it is a central and crucial aspect of sustainable development that cannot truly be achieved while exclusion and discrimination against women and girls continue. Despite the reluctance of many states, some proposals by women’s organisations have finally penetrated official documents, in line with all the international commitments that have arisen so far to promote gender equity. Meanwhile, it may also be considered progress that both documents set out the objective of promoting or guaranteeing peaceful, inclusive and stable societies.\textsuperscript{35}

However, civil society organisations and particularly women’s organisations have also discussed the shortcomings of both proposals and the need for them to be much more ambitious to genuinely attain global sustainable development, full gender equity and international peace. Specifically, while these proposals are considered a step forward regarding the MDG agenda, it is also clear that once again, structural issues are excluded that substantively question the current neoliberal economic model and the macroeconomic policies behind many of the deepest economic inequalities, such as poverty, including its increasingly female face and intergenerational transfer, and the perpetuation of some armed conflicts. In other words, they do not address the serious impact of the global financial crisis or the dire consequences that austerity policies are having on the welfare of the world’s population, and particularly on women. Furthermore, great emphasis is placed on the role of private individuals in promoting development without showing its direct responsibility for the difficult and unfair living conditions of a very important part of the world population. Another major point of criticism is the lack of a focus on human rights, which has been replaced by one of an instrumentalist nature indicating the economic value of equality and equal rights more than their intrinsic value. With regard to the inclusion of peace and security in the development agenda, there are some significant gaps from a gender perspective, since crucial aspects have been left out such as disarmament, demilitarisation and indicators to gauge the impact of violence that are more sensitive to gender. For example, the High-Level Panel’s report proposes that peaceful societies measure their achievements in the target of violent deaths, leaving out other impacts that particularly affect women, such as sexual violence and forced mass displacement, since the chances of dying violently are much higher for men than for women, while sexual violence has a much more pronounced impact on women. An additional risk lies in the fact that ambitious documents with comprehensive goals may be welcomed by civil society, but not implemented by governments later.

A comprehensive review of the implementation of Resolution 1325 is expected to be coordinated by former UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women Radhika Coomaraswamy in consultation with a group of experts from civil society, the United Nations and other spheres. Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action will be reviewed during the 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Although the possibility of organising another world conference on women was debated, the idea seems to have been discarded due to various issues like the disapproval of documents that would be a step backwards from previous progress, given the position of some states in this regard.

Despite the major criticism that can be made and the caution that must be taken, the coming together of these three processes should be recognised as an important opportunity to move towards a much firmer and more substantial commitment to real sustainable development in which gender equality and the empowerment of women and children are also a cornerstone for peacebuilding. The United Nations and various states have the chance to demonstrate that international instruments are not worthless, but true platforms for promoting real change. The year 2015 will be one of review and could also become a year of significant progress if civil society can forcefully articulate its demands and states can keep their promises to avoid backsliding, which would have dire consequences for the lives of women and girls.

\textsuperscript{35} For more information, see opportunities for peace, “The inclusion of the reduction of armed violence in the Post-2015 Agenda”.

The new proposed development goals for 2015 include gender equity and the empowerment of women and girls more substantively than the MDGs.
Risk Scenarios for 2015

The threat of ISIS in Iraq and Syria: risks for human security and impacts on the region

Libya: a land of fragmentation, institutional fragility, regional disputes and mounting violence

The escalation of violence in the Chinese region of Xinjiang

Urban violence in Pakistan: Peshawar, Quetta and Karachi, scenarios of conflict and tension

The war in Ukraine: few prospects of a solution

Haiti: the risk of a power vacuum and a worsening political and social crisis

The expansion of al-Shabaab into Kenya: at the doors of a new armed conflict
The threat of ISIS in Iraq and Syria: risks for human security and impacts on the region

The armed jihadist group Islamic State (also known as ISIS or ISIL) rose dramatically in 2014. The declaration of a caliphate in the land under its control in Syria and Iraq last summer was not just a blow, but also marked a turning point. After the surprising capture of Mosul (the second-largest city in Iraq), a statement by the leader of ISIS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, confirmed its ambitions to establish a political entity in the heart of the Middle East, defying the borders drawn by Western powers after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th century. The accelerated offensive launched by ISIS in Iraq and Syria has had serious repercussions for the civilian population, called the territorial integrity of both countries into question, forced regional and international powers to make new strategic calculations and encouraged debates and dilemmas on how to deal with a complex phenomenon that well exceeds military and security challenges. In 2015, ISIS will continue to be one of the main threats to the population and regional stability, and its development will continue to depend closely on how the conflicts are managed in Iraq and Syria. Predictably, ISIS will also continue to grab international attention over other dynamics that keep tearing the region apart.

The emergence and expansion of ISIS is inseparable from a series of conditions in Iraq and Syria. Its beginnings in Iraq were facilitated by the Sunni community’s sense of grievance and exclusion after the fall of the regime of Saddam Hussein (2003), a situation exacerbated by the government policies of Nouri al-Maliki, a Shia Muslim. Thus, it must be stated that the roots of ISIS are linked to the creation of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in 2004 amidst armed struggle against the foreign occupation forces, the mass exclusion of members of Saddam Hussein’s party from the structures of power (“debaathification”) and the dismantling of the armed and security forces. Jihadist leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi took advantage of this context to promote the establishment of a radical armed Sunni group that became al-Qaeda’s branch in Iraq. However, there were tensions with al-Qaeda’s central leadership from the beginning, partly due to concern that the leaders could be sidelined by al-Zarqawi’s upstart branch, which showed an independent nature and ability to attract foreign fighters and partly due to AQI’s attacks on the Shia population, which have become one of its hallmarks since it evolved from AQI into Islamic State. Al-Qaeda is wary of the use of violence against other Muslims in the region. AQI’s campaign against Shia symbols and populations stoked a climate of sectarian violence that hit its worst levels in 2006 and 2007, with 20,000 to 30,000 fatalities per year.

The evolution of AQI was then determined by the death of al-Zarqawi in a US air strike (2006), by the rise of new leadership that created the “Islamic State in Iraq” (ISI) to demonstrate its interest in creating a caliphate and by a joint campaign by the USA and armed Sunni groups that decided to act against AQI partly in rejection of its brutal practices. After weakening under this offensive for a while, ISI regained ground amidst the growing alienation of the Sunni community under al-Maliki’s leadership and after the withdrawal of US forces from the country (2011). Crackdowns on peaceful anti-government protests fostered a climate of radicalisation and empowerment of armed groups that was capitalised on by ISI. By early 2014, the group had advanced towards Fallujah and Ramadi, and in June it took control of Mosul after the Iraqi security forces routed.

The penetration of the Islamic State in Syria was assisted by the militarisation and radicalisation of the conflict between the regime of Bashar Assad and the opposition forces, together with the growing atmosphere of sectarian tension in the region. The evolution of the anti-government revolt from a peaceful popular demonstration to an open war among many different armed groups increased hostilities between Sunnis and Shia throughout the area because the narrative of the dispute was presented as a confrontation pitting the Alawite regime, close to Shiism and Iran, against the Sunni majority opposition. Syria became the scene of an increasingly internationalised conflict after the involvement of different regional and international actors by lending political, economic and military support to various factions. The Syrian groups that gained ground included jihadist organisations such as al-Nusra Front, considered al-Qaeda’s branch in Syria. In this scenario, ISI, which had been under al-Baghdadi’s leadership since 2010, saw the chance to expand its objectives and operations into Syria. In a unilateral decision rejected by al-Qaeda and al-Nusra Front, ISI announced its merger with al-Nusra Front and renamed itself Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham, a reference to Greater Syria, which led to the acronym ISIS (“Daesh” in Arabic), as it is most commonly known today. Throughout 2014, ISIS was involved in a series of clashes with armed Syrian groups, mainly from the opposition. This caused it to be viewed with suspicion from the rebel side and as a foreign group more interested in seizing territory in order to establish a caliphate.

Thanks to this combination of turmoil and sectarianism and the power vacuum, ISIS has thrown the territorial integrity of Syria and Iraq into question, though this is more attributable to the ineptness of its adversaries than to its own merit, according to some observers. In the second quarter of 2014, ISIS controlled or claimed to be present in wide swathes of Iraq and Syria, an area that according to some sources extended from 40,000 to 90,000 square kilometres (equivalent to countries such as Belgium and Jordan). Around eight million people


were estimated to live fully or partially under its control.\footnote{38} The march of ISIS became synonymous with terror and multiple human rights abuses. Various reports from the UN and international NGOs have summarised the macabre crimes committed by Islamic State in its offensives and in areas under its control. In addition to the beheading of Western hostages, which brought greater international attention to its actions, it has perpetrated massacres and summary executions, mass abductions, widespread sexual violence and sexual slavery, indiscriminate attacks on the civilian population, the persecution of religious and ethnic minorities, such as Shia, Yazidis, Christians and Turkmen, forced conversions to Islam, the destruction of priceless religious and cultural heritage and the forced displacement of tens of thousands of people. In areas fully or partially under its control, Islamic State is applying a rigorous and exclusive interpretation of Sunni Islam, imposing severe restrictions on the population, limiting the presence of women in public places and meting out harsh physical punishment (whipping, beatings, stonings and even crucifixions) to those that break its rules.

The use of excessive violence is a part of ISIS’ deliberate strategy to terrify its enemies, force the population to accept its precepts and discourage insurgencies. For this reason, from the standpoint of human security, the main concern regarding ISIS in 2015 will be the situation of the populations under its orbit of influence. One particular aspect of Islamic State is the fact that it has focused its actions against the “near enemy” rather than the “distant enemy” represented by Western states, and especially against Shia minorities and populations considered infidels, with the intent to set up an idealised caliphate. According to some experts, ISIS’ possible expansion strategy in Jordan and Lebanon is a matter of regional concern.\footnote{39}

ISIS has therefore erected a new model for international jihadism in defiance of al-Qaeda. As its name indicates, it is committed to statebuilding with a deliberate strategy sustained by a highly defined organisation. With a pragmatic attitude, its has avoided (or postponed) clashes with adversaries perceived as more powerful or effective and in some areas has chosen the route of cooptation and submission without using the direct and brutal violence that it has applied in other. From an economic standpoint, ISIS has sought to become self-sustaining and has devoted effort to capturing key infrastructure, oil fields and refineries. Though like other groups it has benefitted from outside funding, most of the resources managed by Islamic State come from the sale of oil and gas (ISIS is calculated to be earning between one and two million USD per day from selling petrol on the black market), from money taken from banks seized in cities such as Mosul, from selling archaeological remains and from kidnapping, extortion, theft and tax collection in areas under its control.

In addition, Islamic State has demonstrated the sophisticated use of new technologies as a mechanism of propaganda, to obtain new followers and attract militants to the caliphate. Though accurate figures are hard to come by, it is estimated that one-third of the approximately 30,000 combatants that ISIS has in Syria and Iraq are foreigners coming from more than 80 countries to join its ranks in recent years, of which 2,500 come from Western countries. Various analysts have suggested that Islamic State has become a powerful lure for some disaffected Sunni Muslim youth attracted by its promises of victory and salvation. Looking ahead, especially in Western countries, there is great concern about the flow of fighters not only because it boosts the capabilities of ISIS, but because of the possibility that these militants might activate cells or take action in the name of Islamic State when they return to their countries of origin. Moreover, the rise of ISIS has also led to a series of demonstrations of solidarity and declarations of loyalty from other armed groups in various countries beyond the Middle East. Groups such as Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia and Libya, Jund al-Khilafah in Algeria, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis in Egypt, Taliban commanders in Pakistan and armed groups in India and the Philippines, among others, have declared their allegiance to ISIS in an attempt to ride the jihadist wave of success. In this context, these and similar organisations may undertake actions in their spheres of influence throughout 2015, claiming responsibility for them under the label of Islamic State.

Against a backdrop of turmoil and strife amplified by the last few years of armed conflict in Syria (the war has turned into an existential struggle for powers like Saudi Arabia and Iran and has stoked tensions between Russia and the West), the expansion of ISIS has brought new strategic dilemmas for regional and international powers. The organisation has been identified as a common enemy, but the possibilities of developing a coordinated strategy for it have been limited by other sources of antagonism, mistrust and reluctance to benefit one’s adversaries. Still, tacit alliances have been observed in practice that may only have seemed unlikely at first glance, but have placed the USA, Iran and Hezbollah in the same offensive against the jihadist group. Meanwhile, the Syrian regime has tried to present itself as a necessary ally, and in practice as a “lesser evil” in the fight against the organisation, framing its discourse within the fight against terrorism.

Overall, the strategy to combat ISIS has favoured military means (the USA is leading an armed coalition in conjunction with Arab countries, while Iran is lending tactical and military support to the governments of Syria and Iraq). However, even some supporters and advocates of an armed response to the ISIS challenge have acknowledged its limitations, while sceptics have highlighted its risks, which, alongside the bombardments, bring a constant flow of weapons into the region, favouring the proliferation of arsenals and spiralling violence. Many


\footnote{39} Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, “The Islamic State’s Regional Strategy”, \emph{The Islamic State Through Regional Lens}, European Council on Foreign Relations, 2 October 2014, \url{http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_the_islamic_states_regional_strategy326}.  

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The excessive violence exhibited by ISIS in its strategy to advance and control territory in Iraq and Syria causes the people in its area of influence to fear for the future.

experts and analysts agree that a more complex approach is required for dealing with Islamic State, which among other issues includes effectively blocking the flow of supplies and smuggling that support ISIS (some observers indicate that one of the caliphate’s main weaknesses is its sustainability, since it commands great resources, but not enough to keep the state operational), bolstering the strategies questioning ISIS from within Islam (denouncing the atrocities committed by the group and the aberration of its actions from a doctrinal point of view) and especially discussing the factors that made its rise and expansion possible in Iraq and Syria. Among other things, this implies addressing the problem of the marginalisation of the Sunni community in Iraq and supporting a new political architecture that ensures a more inclusive scheme (the main challenge facing the new prime minister, after Nouri al-Maliki was forced to resign due to the crisis unleashed by the advance of ISIS). In the case of Syria, efforts must be stepped up to end the armed conflict and find a political solution to the severe crisis affecting the country since 2011. It remains to be seen in 2015 whether progress is made in this regard, although the scenario will predictably provide great obstacles, such as those that have prevented a negotiated solution in both theaters to date.

Finally, ISIS’ actions will continue to be a foreseeable focus of international media attention. Without minimising the seriousness of its activities, it is important to note that there is a risk that Islamic State may invite a simplification of the dynamics of conflict in the Middle East and divert attention away from the equally troubling excesses of other players. We must remember that ISIS is not the only group perpetrating abuse in the region, as recalled by the recent condemnation of the massacres of Sunnis by Shia militias in Iraq, the executions of prisoners by Iraqi security forces (in both cases in retaliation for the actions of ISIS) and the UN and human rights organisations’ constant denouncing of the many abuses committed by the Damascus government and Syrian opposition groups as part of the armed conflict. Some analysts have stressed that, to some extent, the international response to the challenge of ISIS may have sent a problematic message to the populations of the region. The complexity arises from the fact that the decision to mobilise resources and efforts against ISIS may be perceived primarily as a response to the threat to certain minorities or to states’ own interests (for example, the decapitation of Western hostages, the fear of ISIS’ advance on the Kurdish city of Erbil with a large presence of international interests and worries about possible attacks), since similar concerns were not observed despite the severe suffering endured by millions of people throughout the region in recent years. Furthermore, this situation has been marked by the US invasion of Iraq and the international community’s failure to stop the war in Syria by means of negotiation. It must be remembered that over 200,000 people have died in Iraq since 2003, that a similar amount have lost their lives in Syria over the last three years and that the area has become an epicentre of the worst crisis of forced displacement of our times. The death count is dramatic enough to underscore the need for a comprehensive approach and the adoption of measures that favour a political solution and stop the bloodshed in the region.
Libya: a land of fragmentation, institutional fragility, regional disputes and mounting violence

The political, institutional and security crisis in Libya worsened considerably over the course of 2014, leading the country to the worst escalation of violence since the bloody battles that led to the ouster of the regime of Muammar Gaddafi. Three years after the long-time Libyan dictator was deposed (and executed), the situation in the North African country has departed radically from expectations of stability, peace and democracy that mobilised many Libyans during the revolts. In fact, Libya is currently characterised by severe polarisation and fragmentation, institutional weakness reflected in the establishment of two parallel governments, the intensification of clashes between scores of formal and informal armed groups of various stripes, the presence of all kinds of illegal trafficking and the serious impact of different types of violence on civilians. Furthermore, some regional rivalries are being projected onto Libya, taking the form of proxy wars amidst the upheaval occurring in North Africa and the Middle East. Among other factors, these aspects give rise to the expectation that Libya will be one of the main risk scenarios for 2015, bearing in mind that all mediation attempts in search of a negotiated solution to the conflict have failed thus far. Further attempts must be able to circumvent major obstacles if this is to change.

In 2014, the dynamics of conflict in Libya continued to be marked by the superimposition of lines of confrontation: struggles between groups close to political Islam and secular groups, fighting between former regime loyalists and “revolutionaries”, disputes between cities and regions, also linked to competition for control over land, resources and power, patronage networks and tribal loyalties and grudges. Against this backdrop of persistent complexity, the way events developed over the course of the year led to the formation of two large rival power blocs. The emergence of the first bloc was linked to the offensive launched in the eastern city of Benghazi, the second largest in the country, by retired General Khalifa Haftar. General Haftar, who defected from the Gaddafi regime and spent more than two decades in exile in the USA, launched attacks by land and air against the Islamist militias controlling Benghazi, presenting the campaign, which he called Operation Dignity, as an attempt to correct the course of the revolution and to assume the security challenges in the country due to the government’s ineffectiveness. Operation Dignity ended up forming a coalition of disaffected members of the military, federalist sympathisers and tribes from the eastern part of the country.

In this context of growing internal tension, new developments fostered the rise of a second pole of power. The elections for a new Parliament held on 25 June constituted a setback for Islamist groups. In response, an alliance of Islamist forces in conjunction with armed groups from the city of Misrata launched an offensive that ended with their capture of Tripoli as part of what they called Operation Dawn. The struggle for the capital included fierce battles over the airport, which had been controlled thus far by a militia from Zintan. The escalating violence prompted the elected legislature, the House of Representatives, to relocate to the western port city of Tobruk, near the Egyptian border. In Tripoli, the previous legislative body, the General People’s Congress, remained in office. Therefore, in late 2014 Libya had two Parliaments, which in turn had elected two governments headed by Prime Minister Omar al-Hasi, in Tripoli, and by Prime Minister Abdullah al-Thinni, in Tobruk, the latter being recognised by most of the international community. After overcoming some initial misgivings, al-Thinni’s government ended up allying itself with Operation Dignity, whereas Tripoli backs Operation Dawn.

The instability associated with this power struggle and increased hostilities had severe repercussions on the civilian population and led most foreigners to leave the country, including the entire staff of the UN mission in Libya (UNSMIL). In these conditions, the impact of the crisis could not be documented properly, which obscures its true dimensions, but a UN report published in September warned of a series of highly worrisome trends that had killed hundreds of people and wounded many others. These included human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law, like indiscriminate attacks conducted by various armed groups using a great variety of weapons in residential areas of Tripoli and Benghazi, serious damage to infrastructure, including hospitals, the killing of activists, journalists and human rights advocates, arbitrary detentions, abductions, torture and summary executions. Figures from UNHCR in late 2014 indicated that the violence in Libya had forcibly displaced around 400,000 people since May. According to some analysts, the situation was leading some parts of the population to wonder if they had not been better off under the former regime.

Coping with the uncontrolled use of violence in the country is a complex task due to the proliferation of militias that operate with total impunity, the mass availability of weapons and the unique aspects of the security system in the country. The policies promoted by the National Transition Council, which took power after the overthrow of Gaddafi, did not achieve the disarmament of revolutionary groups but instead created a system of complex interconnections between the state and different armed organisations that participated in the revolt. Many of the militias were subcontracted by various...
government agencies, which led to the coexistence of formal forces (the Libyan Armed Forces and police) and informal groups that claim legitimacy through their relationships with government bodies. This security system, described by some analysts as hybrid, means that armed groups and militias operate relatively effectively as security forces in some parts of the country, but in other cases are motivated by their own ideological agendas and by political, economic and criminal interests. In this regard, many local conflicts in different parts of the country have often been motivated by competition for control over resources or trafficking routes of all kinds, such as of goods, people, weapons and drugs, taking advantage of the weakness of the central government and the geographical characteristics of Libya, a vast country with population centres concentrated along the coast. Thus, in 2014 militias of various types were involved in many disputes, including for control over oil fields and ports, and did not hesitate to take up arms to pressure the authorities and enforce the adoption of certain policies.

In terms of political and institutional power, the main challenge facing Libya lies in the existence of two parallel governments that claim legitimacy as the highest authority in the country. Though internationally recognised, the Parliament and government established in Tobruk present a series of weaknesses. The legislative body is the result of elections that had a low turnout, equivalent to only one-fourth of the electorate, with 1.5 million registered voters compared to 2.8 million in 2012, of which only one half voted, partly as a consequence of the atmosphere of insecurity and disappointment about political developments in the country. Insecurity prevented people from voting in some areas, which meant that they could not vote for the 200 seats of the House of Representatives. Of the 188 representatives elected, 30 have boycotted the sessions since it moved to Tobruk. The legislative body and government operating in Tripoli, however, have persisted in defending their own legitimacy and were supported by a ruling of the Libyan Supreme Court in November that declared the Parliament in Tobruk unconstitutional due to problems calling for elections. The al-Thinni government rejected the decision. This climate of fragmentation and polarisation has led to a stalemate that some analysts have described as a “balance of weaknesses” between the different political and armed actors, in which none of them are able to impose themselves on the others.

To this scenario is added the projection of regional tensions through the foreign intervention of various players in the country. This internationalisation of the conflict took form in Egypt and the United Arab Emirates’ (UAE) participation in attacks against Libyan Islamist forces. Both countries were accused of being involved in air strikes against positions of the Islamist group Ansar al-Sharia in Benghazi and of Operation Dawn in Tripoli. Meanwhile, Qatar, Turkey and Sudan were identified as allegedly backing Islamist factions in Libya. The involvement of regional actors in the Libyan crisis is not new, however, as some countries reportedly lent military and logistic support to similar armed groups during the revolt against Gaddafi. In this context and in line with a regional trend, both General Haftar and the authorities based in Tobruk have tried to frame their dispute with armed groups in Benghazi and Tripoli as part of the “global war on terror” against jihadist groups, even though the complexities of the turmoil in Libya owe to more than just Islamist stances versus secular ones. This discourse particularly echoes the policy adopted in Egypt by the general and current President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi after the ouster of the Muslim Brotherhood’s (MB) government there.

Despite this rhetorical concern, overall the story in Libya was eclipsed by other issues on the global agenda in 2014, such as ISIS and the crisis in Ukraine, and the international community showed no active commitment to resolving the conflict. In August, the UN Security Council approved Resolution 2174, which condemned the use of violence against civilians and demonstrated its willingness to impose sanctions on whomever threatened peace and stability in the country. The efforts expended to promote initiatives of dialogue and peace in 2014 were not successful. None of the various initiatives promoted by UNSMIL could establish a truce between the armed factions. After being appointed the special envoy for Libya, Spanish diplomat Bernardino León contacted the parties, leading to the first meeting between rival political groups in the western city of Ghadames. While the talks resulted in a commitment to bridge their differences peacefully, they did not...
lead to a ceasefire, given the limited influence of political forces on the various armed groups, which rejected a truce.

A new meeting was planned in Ghadames at the end of the year, aimed at reaching an agreement to manage what remains of the transition period until a new Constitution is adopted and a consensus to curb the violence is reached. The alternatives included allowing the assembly in charge of drafting the Constitution to assume leadership of the transition period or forming a national unity government based on the current distribution of forces in the country.\(^{46}\) However, the conditions imposed by the parties to participate in the dialogue, which provoked several postponements, demonstrated the difficulties in overcoming the polarisation in Libya. The authorities in Tobruk demanded to know the list of participants and insisted that the “terrorist” armed groups must be dismantled and could not participate in the negotiations, while the government in Tripoli pressed the need to acknowledge the Supreme Court’s ruling that the Parliament in Tobruk is unconstitutional. Meanwhile, the UN special envoy seemed to have stepped back from the UN’s initial position regarding its recognition of the authorities in Tobruk. León has made it clear that in the current scenario, neither the representatives in Tobruk nor those in Tripoli are in a condition to claim legitimacy\(^{47}\) and stressed the urgency of moving forward in the talks before the country plunges into a state of total chaos.

Resolving the current situation in Libya is therefore extremely complex. Among other issues, the challenges include ensuring the cessation of violence through ceasefire agreements, the configuration of an inclusive power scheme, the reconfiguration of the security system leading to the disarmament of combatants, arms control and submission to the civilian authorities, in addition to a pledge by regional players not to interfere in the conflict (several countries, including the UAE, Egypt, Turkey and Qatar signed a commitment in this regard in September, but its effective implementation remains to be seen). Meanwhile, the needs of the Libyan population must be addressed, as it has been severely affected by the recent dynamics of violence, the consequences of the war against Gaddafi and the legacy of his repressive and authoritarian government. It was known from the beginning that after decades of authoritarianism the reconstruction of Libya would be complex, since it would require statebuilding in a context with serious institutional weaknesses. The evolution of the conflict in 2014 has confirmed that the challenge is turning out to be even more difficult than expected.


\(^{47}\) Ibid.
The escalation of violence in the Chinese region of Xinjiang

In 2014, the eastern region of Xinjiang in China (also known as East Turkestan) reached unprecedented levels of violence. Although access restrictions imposed by the Chinese government make it difficult to confirm the accuracy of the figures and information, it is estimated that in 2014 around 330 people lost their lives and several hundred people were injured. This confirms the rising trend observed in the region in recent years: in 2013, the government acknowledged the death of around 110 people, although journalistic and academic sources raised that number to around 130 and Uyghur organisations in exile put it much higher. In 2012, Beijing admitted that around 200 episodes of violence and terrorism had been reported. Previously, the region had garnered some media attention for the attacks that occurred in 2008 during the Olympic Games in Beijing and the outbreak of violence in the city of Urumqi in 2009, which caused the deaths of about 200 people. In addition to the increased frequency and intensity of the acts of violence, various analysts think that their greater sophistication and media visibility means that insurgent organisations have achieved a higher degree of organisation and combat and logistic abilities.

Given this situation, Beijing has repeatedly recognised that the Uyghur insurgency is the most real and immediate national security threat facing the country and has bolstered its counterinsurgency efforts, notably increasing its police and military presence in the province, doubling the budget for antiterrorist exercises in Xinjiang and starting a one-year campaign in late May aimed at reducing levels of violence and weakening insurgent organisations in Xinjiang. According to various media sources, six months after the campaign began, 115 terrorist cells had been broken up (40% of them thanks to the information obtained during the interrogation of detainees), 117 centres of religious education had been closed (and 238 people responsible for them were arrested), dozens of people had been sentenced to death and executed for participating in various episodes of violence and around 18,000 documents had been seized that were deemed to encourage terrorism and religious extremism.

Some media outlets have referred to Xinjiang as “China’s Chechnya” and have identified the conflict as one of those that could create the most instability in Asia. However, in the immediate future the situation of violence could be exacerbated by three different factors. First is Beijing’s stated intention to step up its fight against Uyghur insurgent organisations, which could have a serious impact on the human rights situation in the region and boost their legitimacy and membership. Second is the possibility that the armed groups operating in Xinjiang effectively have or could develop links with transnational organisations giving them greater organisational, logistic and financial abilities to carry out large-scale attacks. Third is the new geostrategic scenario opening up in the region with the withdrawal of US and NATO troops from Afghanistan, which among other issues is provoking greater pressure from China on neighbouring countries (especially Afghanistan and Pakistan) to fight and expel Uyghur armed organisations from their territory.

Regarding the first point, there are several reasons to think that Beijing will intensify repression and militarisation in Xinjiang. For instance, Beijing thinks that this strategy has been relatively successful on other occasions and in other contexts to clamp down on social unrest while deterring the emergence of outbreaks of violence, like in Tibet or Inner Mongolia, or in the region of Xinjiang itself in the 1990s. Second, thus far the international community has not unanimously applied political pressure on Beijing to end the many mass human rights violations reported by human rights organisations and Uyghur groups in exile, and in some cases, like in countries bordering with China, has strongly supported Beijing’s strategy and collaborated in its execution. Third is the strategic importance that Xinjiang has for China, both economically and in terms of national security. Xinjiang is key to energy efficiency in China, and therefore to its economic development in the coming decades. It is currently the third-largest oil-producing province in China and it is estimated that only a small part of the reserves it holds have been discovered. A major generator of gas (approximately one-third of national production) and a top source of coal and wind energy, Xinjiang is also essential to China’s energy supply because it is where the main oil and gas pipelines are located that import hydrocarbons from Central Asia and the Middle East, the country’s largest two sources of energy. Note that China is currently the second-largest importer of oil worldwide and one of the most petrol-dependent countries in the world. The alternative to the oil and gas pipelines crossing Xinjiang would be the transport of energy by sea, which would increase time, costs and risks, since it would have to navigate geographically sensitive regions like the Indian Ocean and the Strait of Malacca, one of the hotspots of international piracy. In terms of national security, the fact that Xinjiang shares a border with several countries in Central Asia is also geostategically relevant, due to both the influence that China hopes to have in Central Asia in the coming decades and to the influences and dynamics that may enter China from

some adjacent countries that have suffered armed conflicts in recent decades with the enormous potential to destabilise the region, like Pakistan and Afghanistan. Some analysts think that Xinjiang could serve as a barrier to the entry of potentially destabilising organisations or ideologies into China, but also as a gateway for them.

Another factor that could worsen the situation of violence in Xinjiang is the possibility, raised by the Chinese government and various analysts, that Uyghur armed organisations may boost their capacity for combat due to contacts with foreign organisations considered terrorists by Beijing or even the infiltration of foreign combatants into Chinese territory. In this regard, some caution that the armed groups’ modus operandi could be changing, as demonstrated by the ability to carry out significant attacks beyond Xinjiang (in Tiananmen Square in late 2013 and in the Kunming train station in mid-2014, in an attack described by various media outlets as “11 September in China”), the use of car bombs, indiscriminate attacks against the civilian population and the use of suicide attacks. However, the weapons used in most of the incidents of violence, usually knives or manufactured explosive devices, as well as their seemingly disorganised nature and the high number of fatalities among the assailants, appear to indicate that the insurgent groups are still weak in terms of organisation and professionalism.

Traditionally, the Beijing government has accused the armed Uyghur groups, and especially the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), of maintaining ties to various organisations that it considers terrorists, such as the IMU (a movement formed in the early 1990s that initially operated in Uzbekistan, but over the course of time has extended its radius of action to other parts of Central Asia, Pakistan and Afghanistan), al-Qaeda and Taliban militias in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Chinese government upholds such accusations in its own intelligence reports, indicating that Uyghur militants receive continuous and stable military training in countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan, in the lengthy detention of 22 Uyghurs in the prison at Guantanamo, in the death of various Uyghurs during the air strikes that the Pakistani Armed Forces conducted in one of the tribal areas of Pakistan in the first half of 2014 and in the United Nations’ inclusion of the ETIM in its list of terrorist organisations since 2002. In addition to the presence of Uyghur fighters in other countries, Beijing also recently denounced the infiltration of foreign fighters into Xinjiang, especially from groups coming from Syria. Although the leadership of the ETIM has denied these accusations on several occasions and has even shown some ideological and organisational distance from al-Qaeda, the Chinese government has insisted on the connection between Uyghur separatism and transnational Islamic extremism and has linked its counterinsurgency efforts to the so-called “global war on terror”, thereby obtaining some international support for its policies and a certain degree of silence regarding the consequences of those policies for the Uyghur community in Xinjiang.

Thus, Beijing considers the support that some Central Asian republics have given it in its struggle against Uyghur separatism through bilateral relations and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation to be especially important. This is not only because it facilitates issues such as extradition treaties, but because in this way Beijing neutralises the possible support that the Uyghur cause could gain in some countries due to cultural, linguistic or historical affinities among several Turkic peoples in the region. Historically, the Uyghur community has had cultural ties with other Turkic-speaking peoples and its identity has had a certain transnational component. From Beijing’s perspective, this makes the Uyghur community especially receptive to a certain kind of pan-Turkism promoted by some Central Asian republics and particularly resistant to assimilationist policies pursued by the Chinese government in recent decades. In any event, despite the transnational dimension of Uyghur identity, the potential links between the ETIM and foreign organisations and its alleged closeness to radical Islamism, various analysts maintain that the Chinese government has tended to exaggerate the threat of Uyghur secessionism. At the least, the ETIM has never been able to pose a serious threat to the Chinese government or to uphold a major insurgent struggle due to its lack of support at the international level and the scarce human and material resources available to it.

The final factor that could motivate an increase in tension in Xinjiang is the security vacuum in the region that could supposedly be triggered by the withdrawal of US and NATO troops from Afghanistan. This could have a twofold effect on the conflict. First, some organisations could take advantage of the new scenario opening up in Afghanistan to increase their presence in Xinjiang just as some Uyghur organisations could temporarily or stably establish themselves more easily in Afghanistan. The partial withdrawal from the region of a power like the USA is leading to some rearrangement of the area in geostrategic terms, as demonstrated by the talks that took place throughout 2014 between China, Russia, India and Pakistan to tackle future scenarios and risks regarding security issues. The second effect that the new geostrategic scenario could have on the conflict in Xinjiang is a rise in clashes pitting the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan against Uyghur organisations allegedly located in both countries, the result of bilateral agreements that China is establishing with both governments to increase military pressure against the ETIM.

In this regard, in late October the governments of Afghanistan and China signed an agreement by which Kabul pledged to fight with the ETIM and any other armed Uyghur organisation and expel them from its territory in exchange for economic support from China (especially for building infrastructure and forming state security bodies and forces). New Afghan President Ashraf Ghani publicly reaffirmed the commitment to cooperate

Some media outlets have referred to Xinjiang as “China’s Chechnya” and have identified the conflict as one of those that could create the most instability in Asia
closely with China on security matters, as the government of Hamid Karzai had expressed previously in 2014. In addition to China’s approach to the Afghan government through bilateral economic cooperation and the support that it gave it to achieve observer status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Beijing has also quietly contacted Taliban militias so they do not extend their armed actions into Xinjiang or boost their cooperation with the ETIM or other armed Uyghur organisations. In exchange, China would provide the Taliban insurgency with some political recognition and may have even made some deals on the extraction of resources in northern parts of the country bordering with Pakistan. China’s interest in maintaining good relations with Afghanistan and playing a larger role in the region once the withdrawal of US and NATO troops begins is not only a matter of internal security, but also demonstrates its desire to participate actively in the exploitation of the vast natural resources located in Afghanistan (especially gas and petrol) and their importation into China.\textsuperscript{50}

Moreover, Pakistan and China have been strategic allies for decades, in such a way that in recent years the Pakistani government had committed to fight actively against the ETIM and to collaborate closely with Beijing in terms of security. In 2013, for example, it banned the ETIM, IMU and Islamic Jihad Union and prohibited their presence on its territory. In 2014, it stepped up its engagement with the Chinese government. In June, for example, several Uyghur fighters were killed during an offensive launched by the Pakistani Armed Forces in North Waziristan in which approximately 1,100 people lost their lives. Furthermore, bilateral cooperation increased in various respects in 2014 (in November, for instance, 20 agreements of various types were reached), while both the prime minister and president of Pakistan publicly vowed to redouble their efforts to reduce the presence and activity of Uyghur organisations in the country.\textsuperscript{51}

Although Uyghur separatism has been active in Xinjiang for decades, it had not captured the attention of the media or the international community until relatively recently. Under the cover of the “global war on terror”, Beijing had been able to justify its counterinsurgency policies in Xinjiang, silencing human rights violations reported by Uyghur organisations and ensuring the support of the great powers and neighbouring countries in the struggle against terrorism. Yet in recent years, and especially in 2014, both the increase and greater visibility of armed action by Uyghur separatists has provoked greater repression and militarisation in Xinjiang. In the immediate future, the intensification of Beijing’s counterinsurgency policies, the enhanced combat abilities of armed Uyghur organisations and some changes in their modus operandi, as well as the new geostrategic scenario opening up in the region with the withdrawal of US and NATO troops from Afghanistan, could lead to even higher levels of violence and instability in Xinjiang.

\textit{It is estimated that in 2014, around 330 people lost their lives and hundreds were wounded in Xinjiang in an unprecedented rise in violence.}


Urban violence in Pakistan: Peshawar, Quetta and Karachi, scenarios of conflict and tension

Pakistan is the scene of various armed conflicts and socio-political crises. These contexts have had a serious impact on the population in terms of mortality directly linked to the armed violence, general security conditions and the country’s economy and development. Although the violence is spread across different parts of the country, with a serious effect on tribal areas in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, several large cities, particularly the provincial capitals Peshawar, Quetta and Karachi, are also being shaken. The impact of the violence on large cities is a subject of concern around the world, though it is not necessarily linked to the dynamics of armed conflict or political violence like it is in Pakistan, whose conflicts have a direct impact on its cities. This concern has led to the development of concepts like “fragile cities”, highlighting the serious security and development challenges facing large contemporary cities to ensure the wellbeing of the people residing in them.52

The four Pakistani provincial capitals, Peshawar, Quetta, Karachi and Lahore (and especially the first three), are operational and financial bases for armed groups and criminal networks, often linked to armed groups, that are active in the cities or other parts of the country.53 Though each city has its peculiar aspects and is the setting for some dominant type of violence, they all clearly share some features in common to a greater or lesser extent: they are a base for Taliban or other kinds of insurgent organisations (like Balochi nationalist groups) currently fighting against government security forces; they are a scene of sectarian violence, mainly between Sunni and Shia communities; and they are heavily militarised with an enormous presence of different security forces and troops in public that has a serious impact on the private sphere as well.

Geographically speaking, Peshawar, the capital of the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, lies on the route to Afghanistan and the fact that it is bordered almost completely by the FATA makes it a strategic place for the insurgency that operates on both sides of the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, where many groups have set up their headquarters. During the regime of General Pervez Musharraf, many Taliban groups and groups linked to al-Qaeda were allowed to establish bases in the province while an Islamist political coalition (MMA) was formed to act as a counterweight to traditional parties (ANP and PPP). This encouraged the spread of a radical Islamist political programme, creating an atmosphere conducive to extremism and making the area a hotbed for the Taliban insurgency.54 The growing Taliban presence in Peshawar has been demonstrated by various attacks of great impact, the most serious of which took place on 16 December 2014 in which 141 people (including 132 boys and girls) were killed in an armed assault on a school. Another enormously important attack caused the deaths of 80 people when a car bomb exploded in a church in September 2013. According to figures gathered by the South Asia Terrorism Portal, during the first 11 months of 2014, at least 191 people were killed and 361 were wounded as a result of terrorism-related incidents. Furthermore, many criminal organisations active in the province have ties to insurgent groups, which has contributed to the entrenchment of violence. Alongside the Taliban’s attacks, sectarian violence also became established in the city, with Sunni extremist organisation Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) heavily implicated. The close links between LeJ and the insurgent group Tehrik-i-Taliban (TTP), demonstrated by the dual membership of some of their members and leaders, complicate the field of players responsible for the violence in the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa even further and show the group’s ability to penetrate the city. Dozens of Shia have died as a result of sectarian violence perpetrated by radical Sunni groups in Peshawar, which have also targeted moderate Sunnis.

The violence in Quetta has some similarities to that of Peshawar, as well as some features and dynamics all its own. Quetta is a scenario of various armed conflicts occurring simultaneously: those pitting the Pakistani and Afghan Taliban insurgencies against the Pakistani and Afghan governments and one between the Balochi nationalist insurgency and the Pakistani government. With regard to the Taliban insurgency, the capital of Balochistan has been a tremendously important logistic centre for both sides involved in the armed conflict in Afghanistan, international forces and the Taliban rebels,55 and is the seat of the shura of Quetta, a group of Balochistan leaders headed by Mullah Omar. Quetta has also been the setting for different attacks carried out by the Balochi nationalist insurgency against what it considers the seat of Pakistani colonial power over the Balochi population. The heavy militarisation and many human rights violations committed by the state security forces have also driven many young students in the capital to support insurgent organisations and even to join their ranks. Moreover, many acts of sectarian violence have been committed in Quetta by LeJ against ethnic Hazara, which are predominantly Shia, causing dozens of fatalities.

Karachi may be the Pakistani city where problems of violence are most evident. A megacity (the usual name for cities with more than 10 million inhabitants), it has 21 million residents

54. Ibid.
and may be the most violent city in the world, with a homicide rate of 12.3 per 100,000 residents. To this are added grave demographic problems, as demonstrated by the fact that between 2000 and 2010, its population soared by over 80%.\textsuperscript{56} This demographic increase owes partially to the displacement of populations coming from areas affected by conflicts and violence. Karachi is the scene of an ethnic and political conflict among the supporters of its three main political parties: the MQM (the main political party in Karachi, representing the Muhajir community), the PPP (the main party in the country and second-largest in Karachi) and the ANP (the third-largest party in the city), which represents the growing Pashtun community. All three political parties have their own armed organisations that clash essentially for control of political power in the city. The demographic changes in Karachi as a result of the massive influx of Pashtuns displaced from the northwestern part of the country have aggravated these political rivalries. Moreover, the government’s inability to ensure the provision of basic services in the city, together with poverty and unemployment, have strengthened the criminal mafias competing for resources there.\textsuperscript{57} Although a drop was reported in the number of violent deaths in 2014 compared to previous years (approximately 1,600 in the first nine months of the year compared to nearly 3,400 in 2013 and 3,100 in 2012, the situation remained extremely serious. The lowest murder rates are attributable to the security operation begun in September 2013, which however has clearly been proven to be insufficient because the use of large-scale violence has persisted. One of the most serious examples of the impact of the violence in the city is provided by the district of Lyari Town, a traditional PPP stronghold with a robust presence of armed organisations and where heavy weapons have even been used in clashes between different groups.\textsuperscript{58} Alongside this violence, the Taliban insurgency has also penetrated the city in an attempt to consolidate its presence by taking advantage of the fragility there.

The situation of the three Pakistani cities studied shows the importance of paying attention to urban environments as scenes of conflict and large-scale violence. While cities have traditionally been considered relatively safe places where populations have sought refuge from armed conflict, it is also certain that movements of people towards cities and large-scale changes that are not solely demographic in nature, but also political and economic, may lead to high-intensity situations of confrontation there\textsuperscript{59} with complex connections between political and economic elites and armed and criminal groups and serious impacts on resident populations. In Pakistan, there is a clear risk that the different insurgencies may boost their presence in urban environments, especially in provincial capitals, and that cities may become increasingly militarised, with serious consequences for the future of the country. Pakistani cities run the risk of turning into a scenario of increasingly serious and fatal attacks with severe repercussions for the daily life of the population. Thus, the authorities must focus significant effort in trying to prevent the entrenchment of violence in the cities and take steps to address the deep causes and different dynamics of these conflicts, since cities also provide important opportunities for transforming violence and creating safe environments for people.

\textsuperscript{56} Taimur Khan, “Cooking in Karachi”. Foreign Policy, 3 September 2013.
\textsuperscript{57} International Crisis Group, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
The war in Ukraine: few prospects of a solution

Ukraine has been considered in transition since it gained independence after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. With a population of over 44 million, this extensive country of great geostrategic importance is currently undergoing a major socio-political crisis and armed conflict in its eastern regions and is the scenario of the most serious crisis between the West and Russia since the Cold War. After the dizzying succession of events between late 2013 and early 2014 (mass pro-European demonstrations, known as “Maidan”, the fall of the regime of President Victor Yanukovich, the annexation of Crimea by Russia, anti-Maidan and pro-Russian demonstrations and a militaristic trend in the east of the country that resulted in armed conflict), instability in eastern Ukraine skyrocketed, leading to war with thousands of casualties and hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people (soaring from several hundred between April and June to over 3,000 in late September). The dispute pits armed pro-Russian militias that emerged from the anti-Maidan protests, backed by Russia and joined by international combatants against Ukrainian state forces fighting alongside paramilitary groups under the umbrella of the new pro-European authorities. Background issues such as political status, the degree of decentralisation and language protection are joined by others such as the international crisis between Russia and the West. The development of the war in eastern Ukraine provides few or no prospects for improvement in 2015, with forecasted scenarios that could range from a frozen new future conflict in the OSCE zone to the resumption of a relatively limited active conflict or a drift to a conflict broader in scope. Many factors appear to reduce the possibilities for a peaceful settlement, such as military reinforcement of the parties and a strengthening of their belligerent stances, the limitations of the dialogue process (among others, the agreements have not been implemented), fait accompli policies (e.g., elections “respected” by Russia in the provinces in conflict) and an international context of political, military and economic antagonism among the actors backing the warring parties (the West and Russia), among others. Meanwhile, the negative effects of the continuation of the war, and especially the harmful risks of further escalation with uncertain consequences for the continent, could act as deterrents and force the parties and international powers (the European Union and Russia) to redirect the conflict or at least to limit its scope. However, the outlook at the end of 2014 is worrisome.

Various factors come into play in negative or uncertain future scenarios. First is the militarisation and belligerence of the parties to the conflict. Russia has repeatedly been accused of directly and indirectly supporting the pro-Russian rebels, especially by providing them with weapons, military technology and human resources as they take advantage of a porous border not controlled by Ukraine. In addition to Russia’s “usual suspects” (NATO and the USA), the OSCE, analysts and journalists have indicated or become convinced of these multiple forms of support. Russia denies this support formally and categorically. It also denied at first that the unmarked troops in Crimea were Russian, though it later admitted that they were. However, everything indicates that support is being given to the militias, combined with attempts to keep up the appearance of genuine local authorities. For example, Russian citizens presented as leaders of the rebel forces replaced local leaders at first, but were replaced in turn by local leaders in August 2014. NATO announced support for Ukraine to improve its defensive abilities in several areas, including on issues such as logistics and cyber defence, while allies like the USA and Canada pledged non-lethal military aid. Meanwhile, Ukraine has also decided on military strategies with a serious impact on human security that have fuelled the violent direction of the conflict (including an antiterrorist operation at first instead of other possible strategies; bombardments of population centres, forcibly displacing residents; and collective punishment by cutting off state funding in the Donbas region, which includes the provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk and effects hospitals and schools, based on the argument that the funds would end up in rebel hands). Thus, Ukraine has combined peace proposals and talks with aggressive military practices and has shown itself ready and willing to fight a broader war. In other words, both sides are reinforced, with foreign backing, and predisposed to fight, although mechanisms of dialogue have remained active with uneven results.

Second, the initiatives of dialogue implemented thus far have not been successful and have shown limitations that are difficult to overcome in lieu of the parties’ willingness to do so and given the heavily antagonistic context. Various mechanisms of peace, security and dialogue have been used and agreements reached: the OSCE observation mission since March 2014; the agreement signed in Geneva on 17 April between the interim Ukrainian government, Russia, the EU and the United States; the dialogue through the Trilateral Contact Group (Ukraine, Russia and the OSCE) and its engagement with the political and military structures of pro-Russian groups in the east that resulted in various agreements (a ceasefire and peace plan on 20 June, the Minsk Protocol on 5 September, the Minsk Memorandum on 19 September and the separate ceasefires in December in Donetsk and Luhansk); bilateral and multilateral diplomatic meetings with Germany as the main Western government dealing with Russia; and a multilateral meeting in Milan during the ASEM summit in October, among other examples. The scope of the different agreements, most of them extensive and substantive, addressing security and political issues, decentralisation and language protection, has stood in contrast to the lack of implementation of ceasefire commitments in different areas. The special representative of the rotating chairperson-in-office of the OSCE in the Trilateral Contact Group, Heidi Tagliavini, a diplomat with extensive experience in the region, described the 5 September agreements as a great achievement in the final months of 2014, saying that the ceasefire was still being observed in large areas.
of Donbas. Though she also considered the situation “terrible” in some areas, overall she showed confidence in the process. In early December, the possibility of new rounds to produce partially positive results was hinted at, through the challenge consisted of greater implementation and maintenance of the agreements, issues closely linked to Russia’s role (as an actor with power over the militias in practice) and international relations, a key and mostly worrisome and uncertain aspect.

This leads to a third set of arguments about the conflict’s reasons for concern, related to its international dimension. The crisis in eastern Ukraine is not just an internal armed conflict. International issues have been projected onto it, making for the worst crisis between Russia and the West since the end of the Cold War and adding obstacles to its resolution. The crisis has opposing narratives. One is the Euro-Atlantic perception of aggressive Russian policies, which in some cases have broken international law, and of the gap between rhetoric and facts (Russian pressure on Ukraine in 2013 not to sign the Association Agreement with the EU, the capture and subsequent annexation of Crimea in 2014, support for pro-Russian militias, accusations that Russia is party to and an arbiter in the conflict, among others). Russia’s fait accompli policy has assisted the military escalation and has made containing and resolving the conflict enormously difficult. Meanwhile, the West’s position is linked to Russia’s alleged expansionist ambitions and its attempts to impose (or maintain) control over the former Soviet satellite states, among other aspects, with the ability to destabilise sovereign territories. As such, the West views its own approach to the region as a reflection of the sovereign interests of the populations and governments of these countries to freely strengthen their relations with the European Union and NATO as part of their processes of democratisation and the search for security guarantees. According to this narrative, Russia cannot oppose the road chosen by these countries, even by Ukraine. Meanwhile, other analyses indicate that Russia views the expansion of NATO and the EU’s economic and democratising agenda into what it considers its area of influence as unacceptable. For example, Russia equates it to a situation in which a military power rivalling the United States tries to integrate a neighbouring country into its orbit. Russia views this Euro-Atlantic advance as a threat, a tipping of the balance and a breaking of the security scheme in the OSCE zone after the end of the Cold War and also claims that it intends to promote regime change in Russia’s area of influence and finally in Russia itself. Therefore, Moscow has been more supportive of a neutral status for Ukraine, a position that in fact was favoured by most of the Ukrainian population prior to the events of Maidan and the armed conflict. Some in the West and elsewhere have also voiced support for a solution of neutrality, even if it is perceived as pro-Russian in mainstream Euro-Atlantic circles, displaying a lack of self-criticism by the EU regarding the course of events and the clear pro-Euro-Atlantic position of the newly elected Ukrainian authorities. In addition, some analysts also point to Russia’s fears of possible contagion of the path taken by Ukraine (the Maidan protests, the overthrow of the government, new pro-European authorities emerging from the elections) in its own territory, despite the Kremlin’s strong vertical control of freedoms of speech and the press.

The future scenarios in the conflict in eastern Ukraine are worrisome given the antagonism of the parties, the fragility and poor implementation of the agreements, Russian support for rebel groups and the projection of rivalries between Russia and the West, among other aspects

Instead of better relations between Russia and the West, the mutual discomfort grew during 2014, as did actions respectively interpreted as aggressive. These included Russia’s annexation of Crimea, the West’s subsequent sanctions against Russia and NATO’s decision to create a rapid reaction force in 2014 (provisional in 2015 and permanent in 2016), which will not have a fixed base but will have pre-positioned facilities in Eastern European countries. In response, Russia also warned in 2014 that it would review its strategy towards NATO and indicated that it considered Ukraine’s entry into NATO to be a red line, although analysts indicated that in practice, the collective defence organisation was unlikely to accept Ukraine as a member. Furthermore, although in November Germany’s foreign ministry indicated possible new approaches that would include meetings between the European Union and the Eurasian Union, demonstrating the importance of improving international relations projected in the conflict, events did not move in that direction. After first presenting itself as the main Euro-Atlantic bridge to Russia in 2014, Germany also began to toughen its stance towards it. Meanwhile, Russia delved into patriotic and belligerent rhetorical discourse.

Despite the complicated internal and international atmosphere, there are still factors that could help to limit or prevent the most negative scenarios, including the continuation of channels of dialogue through frameworks and players accepted by both parties, the international presence on the ground (OSCE), the deterrent effect of the uncertain risks of a conflict of greater scope and others. In any case, given the gravity of the situation and the unwillingness of the parties to implement the agreements achieved thus far, as well as the deterioration in international relations projected over the conflict, the future prospects for Ukraine and its eastern provinces do not give grounds for optimism and call for a redoubling of peacebuilding efforts.
Haiti: the risk of a power vacuum and a worsening political and social crisis

The political and social crisis in Haiti worsened in 2014, with continuous demonstrations demanding the departure of President Michel Martelly and Prime Minister Laurent Lamothe, as well as institutional paralysis resulting from the confrontation between executive and legislative power that culminated in the resignation of Lamothe and the entire government in mid-December. The catalyst of the protests and the institutional impasse was the inability to hold legislative and local elections that have been postponed since 2011 and 2010, respectively. Some analysts think that the situation of political tension, social polarisation and institutional failure to govern in Haiti may be exacerbated significantly in 2015, since the term of the legislature expires on 12 January, opening the door for Martelly to rule by decree. In such a scenario, the opposition has already declared its intention to call massive and continuous protests and the international community has expressed its fear of outbreaks of violence.60

The term of one-third of the Senate ended in May 2012 and the terms of another third of the Senate and the entire Chamber of Deputies end in January 2015, which would leave the legislature non-operational as a whole and create a crisis of legitimacy and an institutional vacuum. Faced with such a prospect and the international community’s repeated concerns, talks began between the executive and legislative branches of government. Following several months of disagreement, a historic deal facilitated by the Catholic Church was achieved in March 2014 between the government, legislature and main political parties to hold elections and reduce the social and political tension of recent years. The most notable aspects of the agreement included the formation of a much more inclusive government, the creation of a new electoral body to replace the Provisional Electoral Council, the ratification of several amendments to the electoral law and the holding of the elections postponed since 2011 on 26 October.61 Some points of the agreement were later implemented, such as a major shakeup in the government (the fifth since Martelly took office in May 2011), with the addition of 10 new ministers, some of them close to opposition groups. However, the distance between the parties’ stances grew in the second half of 2014, with the opposition accusing the government of mismanagement and corruption and demanding the resignation of the president, while the government accused six opposition senators of blocking the passage of amendments to the electoral law, necessary for holding the elections.

Given this fresh political and institutional crisis, in late September Martelly began two months of consultations with opposition representatives and various sectors of Haitian society. Yet by the end of November, no significant agreement had been reached and not even any common ground had been found, partially due to the opposition’s boycott of the consultations. Martelly then appointed an 11-person advisory committee to propose recommendations designed to remedy the situation and resolve the crisis. In early December the committee made its recommendations public, which included the resignation of the prime minister, the chairman of the Supreme Council of the Judiciary and the members of the Provisional Electoral Council. A few days later, Martelly accepted the recommendations and Laurent Lamothe immediately tendered his resignation and that of his bloc government. Nevertheless, the opposition said that the recommendations in the report issued by the 11-person committee were insufficient and announced its intention to continue leading mass protests in various cities, including those timed with the visit of US Secretary of John Kerry to the country in mid-December. In fact, the stances of the government and part of the opposition remained distant and relatively unchanged throughout 2014. The opposition complains that the amendments to the electoral law required to hold elections that have been passed by the Chamber of Deputies are unconstitutional and believes that talks between the government and the opposition should not be restricted to simply resolving the institutional crisis, but should also address issues like the release of detained members of the opposition and the resignation of the president, who they accuse of negligence and corruption. In fact, the opposition thinks that the initiatives for dialogue promoted by the government at the end of the year were purely cosmetic and solely aimed at reducing pressure from the international community.

In addition to the distance between the government and opposition’s positions, other factors partially explain the magnitude of the current political crisis and the problems in finding a short-term solution. First, because of the impossibility of holding the delayed elections, the crisis arises in a context of several transitions and lines of polarisation. For example, the International Crisis Group indicates that since the fall of Jean-Claude Duvalier in 1986, the country has been undergoing five different transitions simultaneously: from armed violence to peace and reconciliation; from an anti-democratic political culture to a democratic one; from a failed state to a modern nation state; from a system with high rates of poverty and inequality to another with greater social justice; and from a country physically devastated by the earthquake in 2010 to another in which reconstruction may be leveraged for other systemic transformations.62


61. Shortly after signing the agreement, the government announced that the local elections would be held on 28 December, while the highest electoral authority should set the date for the second round of the legislative elections.

In this regard, the current crisis over the institutional vacuum that could occur starting in mid-January is just one (but hardly the only) visible line of tension in the country, and in fact some analysts believe it may have become a catalyst for significant parts of Haitian society to express a deeper malaise. Many related protests were held in 2014 against issues such as poor service delivery, the precarious economic situation and the continuous vulnerability tens of thousands of victims of the earthquake that struck Haiti in January 2010, claiming the lives of over 300,000 people and leaving more than 1.5 million homeless. At the beginning of the year, for example, there were protests to demand better socio-sanitary conditions or relocate the population in some of the 271 camps where OCHA claims that over 146,000 people are still living. Another source of recent tension was the demonstrations staged by supporters of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in early 2014 to commemorate the tenth anniversary of his departure from the country, which he and his sympathisers consider forced, and to protest an arrest warrant dictated by a judge in mid-August after Aristide failed to appear to testify as part of an investigation into a case of corruption and money laundering that took place during his presidency. Although the arrest warrant had still not been executed by late September, the judge did order the surveillance of Aristide’s home to make sure he could not leave, putting the former leader under de facto house arrest. This situation prompted many demonstrations by Aristide’s supporters and incidents and clashes between protestors and police on various occasions during the year. Recently, the country has also seen large and violent demonstrations linked to demands made by former soldiers to receive compensation from the state or to re-establish the Haitian Army, broken up by Aristide in the mid-1990s. There have also been protests against the presence of the UN mission in the country (MINUSTAH), which has been accused on various occasions of political bias (against the groups closest to Aristide), of committing various human rights abuses and violations, of being an occupation force and not a peacekeeping mission and of reintroducing cholera into the country, which caused the deaths of thousands of people.

Another factor hindering the prospect of a peaceful and negotiated solution to the crisis is the fact that it comes within a context of enormous social and political polarisation, confrontation and mistrust between the branches of government and political practices in which facing off has prevailed over agreement. In fact, since Aristide returned to power in the mid-1990s after the military coup that deposed him, every Haitian president has faced mass demonstrations led by the opposition. Some of them have forced the president to resign, as was the case with Aristide in 2004, while others have chipped away significantly at the president’s (or government’s) legitimacy, as happened to René Préval. From 2006 to late 2014, seven people have stood at the helm of government (eight if counting Lamothe’s replacement). In the current situation, a significant part of the opposition has already announced its intention to led demonstrations until Martelly resigns. For example, Fanmi Lavalas, the party founded by Aristide and one of the political forces that can mobilise the most people across the country, accuses the government of political persecution and rejects any kind of dialogue as a mechanism for resolving the crisis, preferring public demonstrations.

Regarding the mistrust between the branches of government, Martelly lacks significant legislative support, which tends to cause problems in passing legislation to sustain government action. For example, Laurent Lamothe was the fourth candidate that Martelly proposed for prime minister (two others were rejected and the third stepped down a few months after being nominated), which provoked a long period of government paralysis. Virtually none of the presidents in the last five decades have represented stable political parties, but have headed electoral alliances, often with short-term interests. This reflects the fragility and volatility of the party system and the tendency to fill this vacuum with charismatic figures that can weave electoral alliances. The mistrust that has affected relations between the presidency and the legislature since Martelly came to power has been stoked by breaches of previous agreements (two of the most recent examples of which are the agreement of December 2012 to reform the Provisional Electoral Council and the agreement of March 2014 to hold the postponed elections), the government’s accusations that the opposition is trying to accomplish through political and social instability what it is not certain to achieve through the ballot box and suspicions among the opposition that, faced with a legislature not allied with him, Martelly has actually been preparing for some time for the right situation to govern by decree, as could happen if the legislature’s term expires in mid-January 2015. Moreover, several analysts have echoed the opposition’s fears about Laurent Lamothe’s intentions to run in the presidential election scheduled for late 2015, as well as Martelly’s manoeuvring to assist the plans of Lamothe, a personal friend of his.

Furthermore, the open dispute between the executive and legislative branches of government has also ended up affecting the establishment and consolidation of the democratic institutions of the state. After several decades of iron dictatorships, the Constitution of 1987 aimed to prevent any concentration of power under the executive branch and created important mechanisms to share and balance powers in such a way that the design and function of some of the country’s main institutions depend on consensus between the executive and legislative branches. Thus, the impasse of some bodies such as the Permanent Electoral Council, the Supreme Council of the Judiciary and the Constitutional Council (separate from the Supreme Court) is undoubtedly linked to the troubled relationship between the government and the legislature in recent years. The weakness of the state’s
democratic systems is not just an outcome of the chronic political conflict in Haiti, but has also ended up exacerbating the conflict and undermining the legitimacy and capacity of some of these institutions to arbitrate the political crisis. For example, the lack of agreement about the composition and functions of a new electoral body to replace the interim one active provisionally in Haiti for years is closely related to the frequency with which elections have been postponed in recent years, systematically low turnout and the many controversies that have come up recently (the publication of results, the logistic organisation of election day, the admission and revelation of candidates, etc.).

In light of the overall situation, the international community has repeatedly voiced its concern about the immediate future of the country, as indicated by the attempts of the US Embassy to facilitate talks between the government and the opposition in late 2014 and the organisation of an international conference in Vatican City in January 2015 regarding the humanitarian situation in Haiti five years after the earthquake. Furthermore, hopeful signs have appeared in recent months regarding the capacity for dialogue and agreement between the parties, like the deal facilitated by the Catholic Church in March 2014, the round of talks Martelly held with several political and social representatives and the president’s acceptance of the recommendations of a committee of eminent people to overcome the current crisis. Thus, at the end of 2014, even though the effects that the resignation of Lamothe and his government had on the political crisis still remained to be seen, some analysts thought there could be a clearly positive impact. In any case, the prospect that all possible elections (Senate, Chamber of Deputies, presidential and local) could take place in Haiti in 2015 is also hardly conducive to the atmosphere of dialogue and agreement necessary to overcome the current impasse, since some of the largest demonstrations in the country in recent times have come during elections. Furthermore, the conditions of structural instability framing the current crisis, the institutional weakness of the country, the ongoing confrontation between the government’s branches of power, the opposition’s refusal to sit down for talks with the government, the accusations of mismanagement levelled at Martelly’s government and the continuous and mounting demonstrations in the main cities in the country, which have already caused several episodes of violence in recent months, are also detrimental to a climate suitable for resolving the crisis.

The expansion of al-Shabaab into Kenya: at the doors of a new armed conflict

The operation launched by the Kenyan Armed Forces in Somalia in October 2011, on the grounds that the threat of the armed Somali Islamist group al-Shabaab had to be prevented from expanding its activities beyond the borders of Somalia, has led to an increase in violence and attacks by al-Shabaab and groups allied with the Islamist insurgency in Kenya. Since 2013, around 200 people have died as a result of these actions in Kenya. In addition to the military activities undertaken by traditional Somali enemy Ethiopia and the USA since 2006, Nairobi’s military operation in Somalia has helped to justify al-Shabaab’s reason for existence, the fight against foreign troops in Somalia. Alongside and because of that, the Kenyan government has increased pressure on the Somali community in Kenya as part of its antiterrorist policy to halt the wave of violence. This has not only helped to foster support for al-Shabaab among the Somali community and stoke resentment of Kenya’s institutions and security forces, but has also fuelled anti-Somali sentiments in the country.

The current situation is increasingly explosive for what had thus far been one of the most stable countries in the region after surmounting the post-electoral violence of 2008, with one of the most dynamic economies in East Africa.

Armed violence has escalated in Kenya since the beginning of Kenya’s Operation Linda Nchi (“Protect the Country” in Swahili) against al-Shabaab on Somali soil in October 2011, in coordination with the Ethiopian Armed Forces and Somali Armed Forces. Nairobi’s military occupation of southern Somalia was motivated by the desire to create a buffer zone to prevent the conflict in Somalia from spilling over its borders. Soon it became apparent that the operation, which at first seemed solely aimed at rolling al-Shabaab back from the border, assumed the look of conventional war and permanent occupation. Until that time, Kenya had not been affected by the conflict raging in neighbouring Somalia. Since the fall of the Islamic Courts Union in 2008, its armed wing, al-Shabaab, had taken control of the centre and south of the country, approaching Kenya, but without conducting any direct attacks against Kenyan interests or populations.

However, by June 2011 the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea had already identified indigenous networks outside Somalia that were involved in recruitment, radicalisation and the movement of resources on behalf of al-Shabaab, primarily in Kenya. They also said that this trend, demonstrated by the attacks in Kampala in July 2010, indicated not only that al-Shabaab was willing and able to carry out these kinds of attacks, but that it was giving rise to a whole new generation of jihadist groups in East Africa. According to some analysts, if al-Shabaab did not take any action in Kenya until 2011, it was because it considered the country a safe rearguard. In the past, al-Shabaab’s presence in Kenya had mainly centred on the Somali ethnic community, but in 2009 the group expanded its influence, attracting new members among Kenyans of non-Somali origin that according to the Monitoring Group’s estimates are currently the largest and structurally best organised non-Somali group operating under al-Shabaab. Kenya began to recruit and train Somali pro-government militias in 2009 and al-Shabaab threatened Kenya over the issue in early 2011. Various actions and attacks were carried out in the border area by al-Shabaab in 2011. Together with the abduction and killing of tourists and aid workers in Kenya, which was blamed on al-Shabaab (although the authorship was never clear), this armed activity gave a boost to the most militaristic voices and led to the beginning of the military operation in October. In March 2012, Kenya announced the integration of the military contingent into AMISOM, a decision that became effective in June. Yet three years after the military intervention in Somalia began, the Kenyan government has still not elaborated a real strategy for resolving the conflict or adequately explained why the operation continues.65

Three years after the military intervention in Somalia began, the Kenyan government has still not elaborated a real strategy for resolving the conflict or adequately explained why the operation continues.

Meanwhile, actions proliferated and grew in various parts of Kenya, including in a suburb of Eastleigh (Nairobi) known as Little Mogadishu, in Mombasa and in towns in the north and northeast of the country (Garissa, Wajir, the Daadab refugee camp and the Mander border area). Yet it was the attack on Westgate mall in Nairobi, from 21 to 24 September 2013, which marked a turning point in the country’s views of the menace posed by the Islamist group. This attack on a shopping centre in a wealthy district of the capital, Westlands, caused the deaths of 67 people and wounded 175. However, the three-day siege, the chaos and lack of control of the situation, the hostage-taking and the visibility of some of the victims, including 19 foreigners of various nationalities, such as a relative of the country’s president, an important pregnant Kenyan journalist, a Canadian diplomat and a Ghanaian poet and diplomat, made it the worst attack in Kenya since the one that hit the US Embassy in Nairobi in 1998, which killed 200 people. That attack marked the beginning of major changes in perceptions of the global threat of Islamist insurgencies worldwide. The successive attacks in 2014, the most prominent of which were in Mpeketoni and Poromoko in June, which killed 60 people, and in Mandera in November, which claimed around 40 lives, have created an

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atmosphere of insecurity psychosis, with Western embassies warning off tourists and sending home all non-essential staff. This situation has hurt one of the main sources of income in the country due to the serious impact on the tourist industry, with a sharp drop in tourist arrivals, thousands of layoffs and closures of hotels on the coast. The government interpreted this reaction as an attempt to damage tourism in the country and began a populist anti-Western discourse that was joined by criticism of the ICC’s action against President Uhuru Kenyatta and his Prime Minister William Ruto for their responsibility for the post-election violence in early 2008.

These acts of war by al-Shabaab in Kenya provoked a harsh government response in an attempt to restore an aura of security and national and international credibility, but at the same time it triggered a climate of fear and mistrust in society by carrying out measures that consisted of collective punishment against the Somali community in Kenya, placed under suspicion as a whole. Measures such as the Nyuma Kumi initiative (“Know your neighbour” in Swahili), which divides houses into groups of 10, turning neighbours into informants that watch out for suspicious activities, has shown to be ineffective and has been blasted by many analysts. In April 2014, the government launched Operation Usalama Watch for the purpose of verifying and detecting the existence of illegal immigration, arresting suspects of participating in terrorist activities and curbing crime in general. Around 4,000 Somalis were detained and transported in inhumane and degrading conditions to Kasarani state, prompting harsh criticism from human rights organisations and the Somali government. As a result, at least 300 people were deported, but that did not improve the climate of security and damaged relations between the Somali community and the Kenyan government. Although al-Shabaab is identified as a Somali group, as a Salafist-Wahhabi organisation it does not help to increase support for the actions of al-Shabaab and its allies.

The regular retaliation against the Somali Muslim population and xenophobic reaction triggered after several incidents helps to increase support for the main threat of internal division between international jihadism and Somali nationalism: from being residual, the former has become dominant, and the leader killed in September, Ahmed Godane, was a fervent supporter of the internationalist faction, having executed opposition leaders and expelled or cut back the power of the most nationalist sectors to the point where al-Shabaab is now a de facto transnational jihadist movement.67

His successor, Ahmed Omar (also known as Abu Ubaidah), has continued along the same lines. Thus, aside from the invasion and occupation of Somalia (as part of the Muslim world) by the Kenyan Armed Forces, al-Shabaab is justifying its attacks in Kenya by referring to the oppression, intimidation and extrajudicial killings suffered by the Muslim population there. As a result, it is imperative that Nairobi reconsider its policy towards Somalia, its efforts in the fight against the Somali al-Shabaab insurgency and its policies towards the Muslim and Somali communities in Kenya. Despite having helped to weaken the activities and power of al-Shabaab in Somalia, this has led to the emergence of the group in Kenya and is a growing factor of instability and violence that may have even more serious consequences in the near future.

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Annex: Opportunities for peace and risk scenarios in previous years

Opportunities for Peace

2014

- Iran and nuclear talks: an opportunity beyond the atomic dispute
- The Colombian Women’s Truth and Memory Commission, a feminist approach to peacebuilding and recovering memory
- The peace process in Mindanao: inclusivity and a gender perspective
- West Papua: the diplomatic internationalisation of a forgotten conflict
- Serbia and Kosovo, from antagonism to the pragmatic normalisation of relations
- The cessation of hostilities in the border dispute between Thailand and Cambodia
- The dialogue on Transdniestria
- The Arms Trade Treaty and the new challenges of disarmament

2013

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

2012

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

2011

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

2010

- Ten years of Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security
- The International Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
- The African Convention on the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons
- Initiative to resolve the Kurdish question in Turkey
- Peace negotiations in the Niger Delta (Nigeria)
2009
- The Geneva Declaration: a reduction in armed violence for 2015
- The peace agreement in Burundi
- The Inclusive Political Dialogue in Central African Republic
- Openness for peace in Colombia
- The consolidation of peace in Nepal
- The negotiations for reunifying Cyprus
- The inclusion of Syria into the regional peace picture
- The application of the EU’s Common Position on arms trade
- The closure of Guantanamo as a turning point on the present human rights crisis
- Resolution 1820 on sexual violence as a weapon of war

2008
- The peace process in northern Uganda
- The implementation of the peace agreement in Côte d’Ivoire
- The signing of the peace agreement in the southern Philippines
- The consolidation of the transition process in Haiti
- The creation of a Truth Commission and International Criminal Court in Burundi
- The process of dialogue and transition for Myanmar
- The signing of an international treaty for the banning of cluster bombs
- The impact of the United Nations Declaration on indigenous peoples in the resolution of conflicts

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

2014
- Global challenge: forced displacement of population at the worst level since the 1990s
- Iraq: Devastating toll of a decade of war amidst growing turmoil
- Internationalisation and radicalisation of the conflict in Syria and its destabilising regional impact
- Eritrea facing a possible implosion of the state with unforeseeable consequences
- Thailand: a decade of protests and an uncertain future
- Increasing violence in the Chinese province of Xinjiang
- The dispute between China and Japan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and the struggle for power in East Asia
- Turkey-PKK talks: internal Turkish crisis and regional instability
The Escola de Cultura de Pau (School for a Culture of Peace, hereinafter ECP) is an academic peace research institution located at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. It was created in 1999 and it is directed by Vicenç Fisas, who is also the UNESCO Chair on Peace and Human Rights at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

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

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

• Second track diplomacy. The ECP promotes dialogue and conflict-transformation through second track initiatives, including facilitation tasks with armed actors.

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

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

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

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