I. Tracking armed conflicts and peace processes

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In 2020 active armed conflicts occurred in at least 39 states (5 more than in 2019): 2 in the Americas, 7 in Asia and Oceania, 3 in Europe (2 more than in 2019), 7 in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and 20 in sub-Saharan Africa (3 more than in 2019)—see chapters 3–7, respectively.[1] As in preceding years most took place within a single country (intrastate), between government forces and one or more armed non-state groups. Only two were fought between states (the border clashes between India and Pakistan and the border conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan for control of Nagorno-Karabakh), and two were fought between state forces and armed groups that aspired to statehood, with the fighting sometimes spilling outside the recognized state borders (between Israel and the Palestinians and between Turkey and the Kurds).

Of the intrastate conflicts, two were major armed conflicts (with more than 10 000 conflict-related deaths in the year)—in Afghanistan (approximately 21 000 reported fatalities) and Yemen (19 800)—and 16 were high-intensity armed conflicts (with 1000–9999 conflict-related deaths in the year)—in Mexico (8400), Syria (8000), Nigeria (7800), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC; 5800), Ethiopia (3600), Somalia (3100), Mali (2800), Iraq (2700), South Sudan (2400), Burkina Faso (2300), Mozambique (1800), Cameroon (1600), Libya (1500), the Philippines (1400), India (1300) and Niger (1100)—see figure 2.1. The interstate border conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan was also a high-intensity armed conflict with an estimated 6700 conflict-related fatalities. However, these categorizations should be considered tentative as fatality information is unreliable.[2] Both major armed conflicts and most of the high-intensity armed conflicts were internationalized; that is, they involved foreign elements that may have led to the conflict being prolonged or exacerbated.

This section discusses the definitions of 'armed conflict' and related terms used in chapters 2–7, and then highlights salient (and largely continuing) features of the armed conflicts and some of their main consequences in 2020, as well as key developments in peace processes during the year. The section concludes with a discussion of the impact of the United Nations secretary-general's call for a global Covid-19-related ceasefire.

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[1] For the definitions of 'armed conflict' and related terms used in chapters 2–7 see the subsection 'Defining armed conflict' and box 2.1 below.

[2] Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 'FAQs: ACLED fatality methodology', 27 Jan. 2020. On casualty counting see also Giger, A., 'Casualty recording in armed conflict: Methods and normative issues', *SIPRI Yearbook 2016*, pp. 247–61; and Delgado, C., 'Why it is important to register violent deaths', SIPRI Commentary, 30 Mar. 2020.
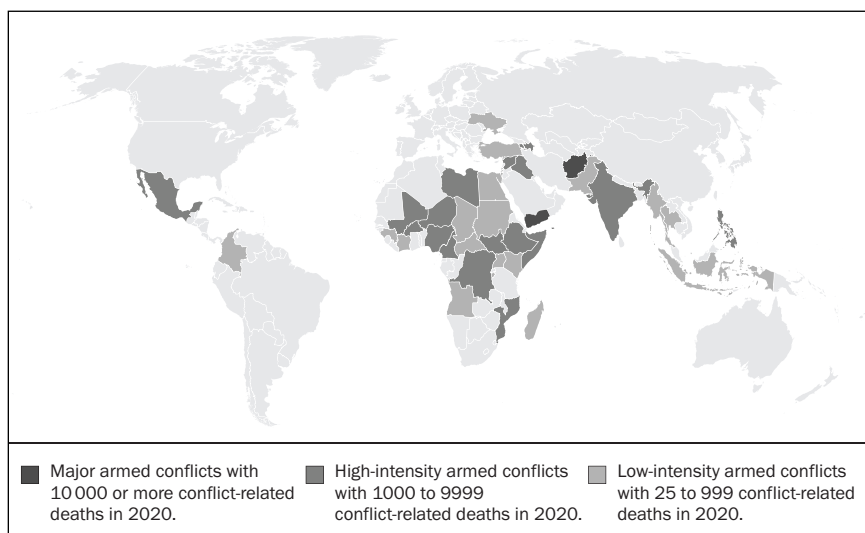
Figure 2.1. Armed conflict, by number of conflict-related deaths, 2020

Defining armed conflict

Armed conflicts are often complex and multifaceted, with multiple actors that have diverse and changeable objectives. This complexity can be a major challenge for the conceptual and legal categorization of armed conflict, as well as thinking on peacebuilding and conflict prevention.[3] Determining the existence of an 'armed conflict' within the framework of international law, for example, differs according to whether the conflict occurs between states (interstate or international armed conflict) or between a state and one or more non-state groups or among two or more non-state groups (intrastate armed conflict, or 'non-international armed conflict' under international humanitarian law).[4] Qualifying the situation as an 'armed conflict' and further defining the nature of the armed conflict—international or non-international—is also crucial for determining the level of protection that shall be granted to non-combatants, for defining the status of a combatant and for determining the level of obligations towards captured adversaries.

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[3] The complexity is captured in United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/ World Bank: Washington, DC, 2018).

[4] For primary sources on the definition of armed conflicts see the 1949 Geneva Conventions common Article 2 and 1977 Additional Protocol I, Article 1 (international), and 1949 Geneva Conventions common Article 3 and Additional Protocol II, Article 1 (non-international)—'Treaties, states parties and commentaries', International Committee of the Red Cross, [n.d.]. Also see e.g. International Committee of the Red Cross, 'How is the term "armed conflict" defined in international humanitarian law?', Opinion Paper, Mar. 2008; and International Committee of the Red Cross, *International Humanitarian Law and the Challenges of Contemporary Armed Conflicts* (International Committee of the Red Cross: Geneva, Oct. 2019), pp. 50–52, 58–59, 75–76.

Not every situation of armed violence amounts to an armed conflict. For example, although criminal violence can threaten the authority and capability of a state as much as an armed conflict, law enforcement activities unconnected to an armed conflict fall outside the scope of international humanitarian law (even if a state's military is involved). However, if the criminal violence meets the threshold of a non-international armed conflict—as was the case in 2020 for the three armed conflicts in Mexico between the Government of Mexico and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación) and the Sinaloa Cartel, and between those two cartels (see chapter 3, section III)—then international humanitarian law applies.

In 2020 most armed conflicts occurred within states. While there can be complications in classifying an international armed conflict—for example, intervention of foreign or multinational forces in armed conflicts not otherwise of an international character or extraterritorial uses of force by a state—it is usually more complex with non-international armed conflicts. There is often no clear dividing line between intrastate armed conflicts and usually smaller-scale incidents of internal violence, such as riots and organized crime gangs. The threshold for an intrastate armed conflict must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis by weighing up a range of indicative data. The two key thresholds relevant to the classification of a non-international armed conflict are: (*a*) protracted armed violence and (*b*) one or more organized armed group(s). This evaluation might include whether explicit political goals are stated by the actors, the duration of the conflict, the frequency and intensity of the acts of violence and military operations and the degree of continuity between them, the nature of the weapons used, the displacement of civilians, the territorial control by opposition forces and the number of victims (including the dead, wounded and displaced people).[5] In the Americas in 2020 it was particularly difficult to distinguish between high levels of political violence and armed conflict (see chapter 3).

This complexity in defining an armed conflict also contributes in part to the differences among the main data sets on violence and conflict—including the one that is predominantly used in chapters 2–7 of this Yearbook, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)—each of which has its own definitions and methodology.[6] This part of the Yearbook offers a primarily descriptive (rather than quantitative) synopsis of trends

[5] Vité, S., 'Typology of armed conflicts in international humanitarian law: Legal concepts and actual situations', *International Review of the Red Cross*, vol. 91, no. 873 (Mar. 2009), pp. 69–94.

[6] For an overview of the major advances in the collection and availability of armed conflict data see Brzoska, M., 'Progress in the collection of quantitative data on collective violence', *SIPRI Yearbook 2016*, pp. 191–200. On the role of media bias in conflict data sets see Dietrich, N. and Eck, K., 'Known unknowns: Media bias in the reporting of political violence', *International Interactions*, vol. 46, no. 6 (2020), pp. 1043–60.

Box 2.1. Definitions and types of armed conflict

Armed conflict involves the use of armed force between two or more states or non-state organized armed groups. For the purpose of Part I of this Yearbook , there is a threshold of battle-related violence causing 25 or more deaths in a given year. With the caveat that data on conflict deaths is often imprecise and tentative, the chapters categorize such conflicts, based on the number of conflict-related deaths in the current year, as *major* (10 000 or more deaths), *high intensity* (1000–9999 deaths) or *low intensity* (25–999 deaths).

Armed conflict can be further categorized as follows:

Interstate (international) armed conflict, the use of armed force by one or more states against another state or states, is now rare and mostly occurs at lower intensities or shorter durations. While territorial, border and other disputes persist among states, they are unlikely to escalate to armed conflict.

Intrastate (non-international) armed conflict is the most common form of armed conflict today and usually involves sustained violence between a state and one or more non-state groups fighting with explicitly political goals (e.g. taking control of the state or part of the territory of the state)—although the question of goals is not relevant to the legal classification. It can also be classified as follows:

•   *Subnational armed conflict* is typically confined to particular areas within a sovereign state, with economic and social activities in the rest of the country proceeding relatively normally. This kind of conflict often takes place in stable, middle-income countries with relatively strong state institutions and capable security forces. Sometimes it takes place in a troubled border region in a large country that expanded geographically in the past or has arbitrarily drawn borders.

•   *Civil war* involves most of the country and results in at least 1000 conflict-related deaths in a given year.

•   Either type of conflict is considered *internationalized* if there is significant involvement of a foreign entity (excluding United Nations peace operations) that is clearly prolonging or exacerbating the conflict—such as armed intervention in support of, or provision of significant levels of weapons or military training to, one or more of the conflict parties by a foreign government or foreign non-state actor.

Extrastate armed conflict occurs between a state and a political entity that is not widely recognized as a state but has long-standing aspirations of statehood (e.g. the Israeli–Palestinian conflict). Such conflicts, which are rare, may take place inside and outside of the state boundaries recognized by the international community.

Note: These definitions are used indicatively and not as legal conclusions. Thus, the conflict situations discussed in chapters 2–7 of this Yearbook may be characterized differently under international humanitarian law.

and events in 2020 affecting key armed conflicts.[7] It characterizes and distinguishes armed conflicts within three major categories: interstate (i.e. an international armed conflict), intrastate (i.e. a non-international armed conflict) and extrastate (see box 2.1). It also differentiates them from other kinds of organized group violence (such as criminal violence). To define a

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[7] For more on events in 2020 related to armaments, disarmament and international security see annex C in this volume.

series of violent events as an armed conflict, a threshold of 25 battle-related deaths in a year is used.

Significant features of armed conflicts in 2020

Most armed conflicts since the cold war are fought by regular armies and also militias and armed civilians. Fighting is often intermittent with a wide range of intensities and brief ceasefires, and rarely occurs on well-defined battlefields. The nature of most armed conflicts is context specific; this subsection highlights some of the most significant features of several armed conflicts in 2020.

Non-state armed groups were active in most of the armed conflicts around the world in 2020. An estimated 60–70 million people reside in areas under the control of non-state armed groups.[8] In 2020 ACLED noted a 46 per cent increase in identity militias (armed groups organized around a collective, common feature such as community, ethnicity, religion or livelihood) as compared to 2019. There is also a growing tendency for armed groups, as well as states, to fight in coalitions (such as in Libya, the Sahel and Syria). This sometimes involves state militaries partnering with domestic armed groups, or external states supporting armed groups as proxy agents.[9] At least seven states in 2020 were involved in armed conflicts that were being shaped by proxy elements (Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen), as well as the conflict in Kashmir. Despite the growing numbers of non-state armed groups, state forces remained the most powerful and violent actors in 2020, participating in 52 per cent of all political violence.[10]

Most armed conflicts were fought in 2020 along traditional lines with conventional arms. Armed drones were increasingly used to conduct attacks in many situations of armed conflict, including in Libya, Nagorno-Karabakh, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen.[11] In particular, many analysts attributed Azerbaijan's success in its short war with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh (see chapter 5, section II) to its technological edge in armed drones.[12] Drone technology has proliferated greatly in recent years, with over 100 states currently operating military drones, while several armed non-state groups

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[8] Fidelis-Tzourou, M. and Sjöberg, A., 'Forgotten freedoms: The right to free expression in areas controlled by non-state armed groups', Armed Groups and International Law, 23 Oct. 2020.

[9] Rauta, V., 'Proxy warfare and the future of conflict: Take two', *RUSI Journal*, vol. 165, no. 2 (2020), pp. 1–10.

[10] Kishi, R. et al., *ACLED 2020: The Year in Review* (ACLED: Mar. 2021), pp. 15–17.

[11] Bakeer, A., 'The fight for Syria's skies: Turkey challenges Russia with new drone doctrine', Middle East Institute, 26 Mar. 2020; and Zwijnenburg, W. and Jansen, A., 'Violent skies: How lethal drone technology is shaping contemporary warfare', PAX, Aug. 2020.

[12] Brimelow, B., 'A brief, bloody war in a corner of Asia is a warning about why the tank's days of dominance may be over', Insider, 25 Nov. 2020.

Table 2.1. Estimated conflict-related fatalities by region, 2018–20

Region	2018	2019	2020
Americas	21 461	20 150	17 349
Asia and Oceania	49 469	48 715	25 785
Europe	1 092	480	7 304
Middle East and North Africa	76 340	52 805	33 683
Sub-Saharan Africa	26 072	26 063	36 750
Total	**174 434**	**148 213**	**120 871**

Note: Fatality figures are collated from four event types: battles; explosions/remote violence; protests, riots and strategic developments; and violence against civilians—see Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 'ACLED definitions of political violence and protest', 11 Apr. 2019.

Source: ACLED, Dashboard, accessed 10 Apr. 2021.

have used commercial drones equipped with explosives.[13] The UN secretary-general called for the 'authority of international law' to be applied to the use of armed drones.[14]

The forced recruitment and use of child soldiers and sexual violence are widely perpetrated in armed conflict. In 2019 (the last year for which data is available) Somalia remained the country with the highest number of cases of recruitment and use of children (1495 out of a total of 7747 children recruited and used as soldiers in that year).[15] In an annual report on conflict-related sexual violence, the UN secretary-general described 19 countries of concern and an updated list of 54 parties to conflict that were credibly suspected of having committed or instigated sexual violence in 2019 (the year covered by the report).[16]

During many of the armed conflicts, especially the major and high-intensity conflicts, other international humanitarian law violations were also committed, including the use of starvation to achieve military ends, the denial of humanitarian aid, forced displacement, and attacks on aid and health workers, hospitals and schools. Such violations appear to be on the increase—the rules that are meant to protect civilians in war are being broken regularly and systematically.[17] In remarks to the UN Security

[13] Gettinger, D., 'Drone databook update, March 2020', Center for the Study of the Drone, Mar. 2020; and Hambling, D., 'Mexican drug cartel carries out "drone strikes" in gang war', *Forbes*, 24 Aug. 2020.

[14] UN Secretary-General, 'Secretary-general's remarks to the Security Council open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict', 23 May 2020.

[15] United Nations, General Assembly and Security Council, 'Children and armed conflict', Report of the Secretary-General, A/74/845–S/2020/525, 9 June 2020, pp. 2, 19.

[16] United Nations, Security Council, 'Conflict-related sexual violence', Report of the Secretary-General, S/2020/487, 3 June 2020.

[17] See e.g. United Nations, Security Council, 'Protection of civilians in armed conflict', Report of the Secretary-General, S/2020/366, 6 May 2020; and Metcalfe-Hough, V., 'Advocating for humanity? Securing better protection of civilians affected by armed conflict', Humanitarian Policy Group Briefing note, Nov. 2020.

Council on his latest report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, the UN secretary-general said it showed 'little progress on the protection of civilians, and on compliance with international law, in 2019'.[18]

The latest efforts within the UN system to enhance protection of civilians affected by armed conflict was a 'call to action for human rights' launched by the UN secretary-general in February 2020 to coincide with the 75th anniversary of the UN. Echoing previous calls for a protection agenda for the UN system, the call to action sets out seven key areas for action, including engagement with the Security Council and to 'creatively use the full spectrum of other tools and channels . . . to raise awareness, prevent crisis and protect people effectively'.[19]

Consequences of armed conflicts in 2020

Armed conflicts result in loss of life and life-changing injuries, displacement of civilian populations and destruction of infrastructure and institutions. They also have long-term economic, developmental, political, environmental, health and social consequences.

In 2020 the total estimated number of conflict-related fatalities decreased for at least the second consecutive year (see table 2.1).[20] Overall, conflict-related fatalities have reduced by over 30 per cent since 2018. The decrease in 2020 was driven by further reductions in MENA, where all the armed conflicts had fewer fatalities than in 2019, and in Asia and Oceania, which saw a 47 per cent reduction in 2020, mostly as a result of estimated conflict-related fatalities being halved in Afghanistan. Two regions bucked this trend: in Europe the outbreak of armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan led to a surge in conflict-related fatalities, while in sub-Saharan Africa 18 of the 20 armed conflicts had higher estimated conflict-related fatalities in 2020 than in 2019. For sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, the increase was about 41 per cent, and it overtook MENA in 2020 as the region with the most conflict-related fatalities. Battle-related fatalities decreased by about 10 per cent in 2020 compared to 2019, while fatalities from explosions/remote violence declined by 50 per cent. However, in other ACLED categories of political violence, there was a small increase in fatalities from violence against civilians, while the number of protest-related events rose by over

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[18] UN Secretary-General (note 14).

[19] Guterres, A., 'The highest aspiration: A call to action for human rights', United Nations, Feb. 2020, p. 6.

[20] This assessment is based on ACLED data. For comparison, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) reported total deaths from organized violence reaching a 15-year high in 2014 with about 103 000 deaths and generally declining since then. UCDP's most recent data for 2019 showed almost 75 600 deaths, a decrease for the fifth successive year. Pettersson, T. and Öberg, M., 'Organized violence, 1989–2019', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 57, no. 4 (2020), pp. 597–613.

Table 2.2. Categories of global political violence, 2019–20

Event type	No. of events 2019	2020	Percentage change (2019–20)	Fatalities 2019	2020	Percentage change (2019–20)
Battles	45 398	35 523	−22%	78 619	70 309	−10.6%
Explosions/remote violence	36 197	24 252	−33%	37 832	18 683	−50.6%
Protests, riots and strategic developments	108 413	166 875	54%	3 559	3 107	−12.7%
Violence against civilians	24 091	23 889	−0.8%	28 203	28 772	2.0%
Total	**214 099**	**250 539**		**148 213**	**120 871**	

Note: For definitions of event types, see Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 'ACLED definitions of political violence and protest', 11 Apr. 2019.

Source: ACLED, Dashboard, accessed 10 Apr. 2021.

50 per cent, even though fatalities under that category decreased (see table 2.2).

Separate data on global trends and patterns in terrorism also showed a downward trend in deaths and in the impact of terrorism. The *Global Terrorism Index 2020* reported that the number of terrorism-related deaths worldwide fell by 59 per cent in the period from 2014 to 2019 (the latest period for which data was available), while over 96 per cent of deaths from terrorism in 2019 occurred in countries already in conflict, such as Afghanistan and Syria.[21]

However, while conflict-related fatalities have declined in recent years, other impacts of armed conflict (sometimes in combination with other factors) appear to have increased, including population displacement, food insecurity, humanitarian needs and violations of international humanitarian law. Armed conflict is also a major driver of displacement. For example, one study estimated that 37 million people were displaced in eight war-affected countries involving United States military intervention since the terrorist attacks on the USA of 11 September 2001.[22]

At the beginning of 2020, 1 per cent of humanity were living in forced exile, and in the last 10 years the number of people forcibly displaced almost doubled to 80 million, including 46 million internally displaced refugees in their own countries.[23] These record numbers continued into the first six months of 2020, with conflict and violence triggering a further 4.8 million

[21] Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP), *Global Terrorism Index 2020: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism* (IEP: Sydney, Jan. 2021).

[22] Vine, D. et al., 'Creating refugees: Displacement caused by the United States' post-9/11 wars', Costs of War Project, Brown University, 21 Sep. 2020.

[23] UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 'Briefing to the United Nations Security Council', 18 June 2020. Also see 'Global trends: Forced displacement in 2019', UNHCR, June 2020.

internal displacements, mainly in MENA and sub-Saharan Africa. The half-year figures for Cameroon, Mozambique, Niger and Somalia were already higher than those for the whole of 2019, while the highest number of new displacements were in Syria (1.47 million), the DRC (1.43 million) and Burkina Faso (0.42 million).[24] In the second half of 2020 new displacements were created by outbreaks of armed conflicts in Tigray (Ethiopia) and Nagorno-Karabakh (Armenia and Azerbaijan). Protracted displacement crises continued in many other places, including Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Mali, Myanmar, Nigeria, South Sudan, Sudan, Venezuela and Yemen.[25]

Armed conflict also continued to be one of the main drivers of food insecurity in 2020, with conflict-induced increases in acute food insecurity particularly prevalent in West and Central Africa, and parts of the Middle East.[26] Famine and famine-like conditions were observed during 2020 in areas of Burkina Faso, South Sudan and Yemen. The World Food Programme estimated that at the end of 2020, 270 million people were in acute food insecurity or at risk, across 79 countries, as a result of the triple impact of conflict, climate shocks and the socio-economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic (an 82 per cent increase from pre-pandemic levels).[27] Other UN data suggests the situation will likely deteriorate further in 2021: while 168 million people needed humanitarian assistance in 2020 (following year-on-year increases since 2012 when the figure was 62 million), this is projected to rise to 235 million people in 2021—largely driven by anticipated increases in extreme poverty and food insecurity arising from the Covid-19 pandemic.[28]

Large numbers of children suffer the consequences of armed conflicts: in 2019 (the latest year for which figures are available), 426 million children, almost one fifth of children worldwide, were living in areas affected by armed conflict (2 per cent more children than in 2018).[29] In addition to fatalities through direct injury, children suffer indirect effects of conflict, including malnutrition, disease and human rights violations. The UN sec-

[24] 'Internal displacement 2020: Mid-year update', Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 15 Sep. 2020.

[25] UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Global Humanitarian Overview 2021* (UN OCHA: Geneva, Dec. 2020).

[26] UN OCHA (note 25), p. 32. On food insecurity, also see Zho, J. et al., 'The geopolitics of food security: Barriers to the sustainable development goal of zero hunger', SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 2020/11, Nov. 2020.

[27] World Food Programme, 'WFP global operational response plan 2021', Update 1, Feb. 2021, pp. 4–5.

[28] UN OCHA (note 25), p. 66.

[29] Østby, G. et al., 'Children affected by armed conflict, 1990–2019', Conflict Trends no. 6, Peace Research Institute Oslo, 2020. For an overview of the literature on the use of children in armed conflict see Haer, R., 'Children and armed conflict: Looking at the future and learning from the past', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 1 (2019), pp. 74–91.

retary-general's annual report on children and armed conflict documented more than 25 000 incidents of 'grave violations' against children in conflicts around the world in 2019 (the same as in 2018), more than half committed by non-state actors, and a third by government and international actors. The six categories of grave violations covered in the report are: killing and maiming of children, recruitment and use of children as soldiers, sexual violence against children, abduction of children, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access.[30]

Armed conflict also imposes substantial economic costs on society. While calculating the economic costs of violence is extremely difficult, one study estimated the global cost to be $14.4 trillion in 2019, or 11 per cent of the global gross domestic product (GDP). This was a slight improvement on the 2018 calculation, mainly due to significant reductions in armed conflict and terrorism in 2019. The economic impact of violence in the 10 most affected countries in 2019 ranged from 24 to 59 per cent of their GDP; in comparison, the economic costs of violence in the 10 most peaceful countries averaged 3.9 per cent of GDP. The single largest component in the model was global military expenditure (41 per cent of the total), followed by internal security spending (34 per cent) and homicide (7.4 per cent).[31]

Finally, armed conflict also contributes to the deteriorating condition of the global environment, with consequences for sustainable development, human security and ecosystems—vulnerabilities that are being amplified by increasingly unpredictable climate patterns.[32] Climate change poses multidimensional challenges to peace. In 2020 climate-related shocks continued to amplify drivers of violence in a number of countries. Four interrelated pathways from climate change to violent conflict have been identified: livelihoods, migration and mobility, armed group tactics and elite exploitation.[33] For example, worsening livelihood conditions for herders and farmers in West and East Africa in 2020 contributed to communal conflicts (see chapter 7, sections II and IV, respectively, in this volume).

[30] United Nations, A/74/845–S/2020/525 (note 15), p. 2. Also see 'Open letter to the UN secretary-general on children and armed conflict', Human Rights Watch, 22 June 2020.

[31] IEP, *Economic Value of Peace 2021: Measuring the Global Economic Impact of Violence and Conflict* (IEP: Sydney, Jan. 2021), p. 2. On global military expenditure in 2020 see chapter 8 in this volume.

[32] Schaar, J., 'A confluence of crises: On water, climate and security in the Middle East and North Africa', SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 2019/4, July 2019; and Peters, K. et al., 'Climate change, conflict and fragility: An evidence review and recommendations for research and action', Overseas Development Institute, 10 June 2020.

[33] Mobjörk, M., Krampe, F. and Tarif, K., 'Pathways of climate insecurity: Guidance for policymakers', SIPRI Policy Brief, Nov. 2020.

Peace processes in 2020

Like the conflicts they attempt to address, peace processes are also increasingly complex, multidimensional and highly internationalized, with a wide range of actors, activities and outcomes.[34] In addition, there is a growing number of peace agreement databases and collections.[35] Peacebuilding efforts typically include: ceasefire negotiations; signing of peace agreements; multilateral peace operations; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants (often supported as part of UN peace operations); power-sharing arrangements; and state-building measures. These are all designed to bring about sustainable peace among parties to a conflict.[36] Despite increased efforts in recent years to make peace processes more inclusive, women, community and grassroots organizations continue to be under-represented in the political–military hierarchies at the centre of most peace negotiations.[37] Efforts at increasing women's participation in peace operations and in improving gender training for peacekeepers have had similarly limited results.[38]

Not all peace processes lead to sustainable peace. Inconclusive political settlements, failure to address the root causes of a conflict, and ongoing insecurity and tensions have often led to non-compliance, violations and a recurrence of armed conflict. Many contemporary peace processes are long,

[34] Wolff, S., 'The making of peace: Processes and agreements', *Armed Conflict Survey*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2018), pp. 65–80.

[35] Examples include: UN Peacemaker, 'Peace agreements database', <https://peacemaker.un.org/document-search>; UN Peacemaker and University of Cambridge, 'Language of peace database', <https://www.languageofpeace.org/#/>; University of Edinburgh, Political Settlements Research Programme, 'PA-X peace agreements database', <https://www.peaceagreements.org/search>; University of Notre Dame, Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, 'Peace accords matrix', <https://peaceaccords.nd.edu>; and UCDP, 'UCDP peace agreement dataset', <https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/>.

[36] On multilateral peace operations see section II in this chapter, and in relation to DDR see 'Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration', UN Peacekeeping, [n.d.]. On various interpretations of the term 'peace' as well as other tools for realizing peace see Caparini, M. and Milante, G., 'Sustaining peace and sustainable development in dangerous places', *SIPRI Yearbook 2017*, pp. 211–52; and Caplan, R., *Measuring Peace: Principles, Practices, and Politics* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2019).

[37] Caparini, M. and Cóbar, J. F. A., 'Overcoming barriers to grassroots inclusion in peace processes', SIPRI Commentary, 18 Feb. 2021; Ertürk, Y., 'The political economy of peace processes and the women, peace and security agenda', *Conflict, Security & Development*, vol. 20, no. 4 (2020), pp. 419–39; Wise, L., Forster, R. and Bell, C., 'Local peace processes: Opportunities and challenges for women's engagement', PA-X Spotlight, University of Edinburgh, 2019; and Forster, R. and Bell, C., 'Gender mainstreaming in ceasefires: Comparative data and examples', PA-X Spotlight, University of Edinburgh, 2019.

[38] Ferrari, S. S., 'Is the United Nations uniformed gender parity strategy on track to reach its goals', SIPRI Commentary, 12 Dec. 2019; and Caparini, M., 'Gender training for police peacekeepers: Approaching two decades of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325', SIPRI Commentary, 31 Oct. 2019.

drawn-out affairs that contain rather than resolve the conflict.[39] Indeed, this may be the best option where resolution of the conflict is not possible. Some peace agreements break down and hostilities resume, whereas others achieve a relatively stable ceasefire but not a sustainable conflict settlement, such as the unresolved armed conflicts in the post-Soviet space. However, even within the latter, there remains the danger of a fresh outbreak of hostilities, as occurred in Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2020 (see chapter 5). Even relatively successful peace agreements, such as the 2016 agreement in Colombia, face continuing challenges (see chapter 3). Since the mid 1990s most armed conflicts have been new outbreaks of old conflicts rather than conflicts over new issues. This indicates that root causes of conflicts are not being sufficiently addressed. Moreover, this blurred boundary between war and peace also makes it difficult to identify and conceptualize the end of an armed conflict.[40]

While many of the armed conflicts in 2020 were being addressed by ongoing or new peace processes, with a few notable exceptions, most were either stalled or suffered serious setbacks. Important advances were made in the peace talks in Afghanistan, including a conditional peace agreement between the Taliban and the USA in February 2020 and the commencement of intra-Afghan peace talks in September 2020.[41] A ceasefire in Idlib province in Syria in March 2020 and a nationwide ceasefire agreed in Libya in October 2020 suggested both of those conflicts might be open to some form of resolution soon.[42] In November 2020 a Japanese-brokered ceasefire between the Arakan Army and Myanmar's military opened up new opportunities for dialogue, while a Russian-brokered ceasefire also in November 2020 ended the fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh.[43] However, in sub-Saharan Africa, the peace process in Sudan was the only one to make substantive progress in 2020.[44]

[39] See e.g. Pospisil, J., *Peace in Political Unsettlement: Beyond Solving Conflict* (Palgrave Macmillan: 2019); and Wittke, C., 'The Minsk Agreements—More than "scraps of paper"?', *East European Politics*, vol. 35, no. 3 (2019), pp. 264–90.

[40] De Franco, C., Engberg-Pedersen, A. and Mennecke, M., 'How do wars end? A multidisciplinary enquiry', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 42, no. 7 (2019), pp. 889–900. Also see Krause, J., 'How do wars end? A strategic perspective', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 42, no. 7 (2019), pp. 920–45. On the peace agreement provisions that are consistently associated with successful war-to-peace transitions see Fontana, G., Siewert, M. B. and Yakinthou, C., 'Managing war-to-peace transitions after intra-state conflicts: Configurations of successful peace processes', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2020), pp. 25–47.

[41] On the peace process in Afghanistan see chapter 4, section II, in this volume.

[42] On the peace processes in Syria and Libya see chapter 6, sections II and IV, respectively, in this volume.

[43] On the ceasefire in Myanmar see chapter 4, section III, in this volume; on the ceasefire agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan see chapter 5, section II, in this volume.

[44] On the peace processes in Sudan see chapter 7, section IV, in this volume.

The UN secretary-general's call for a Covid-19-related global ceasefire

On 23 March 2020 UN Secretary-General António Guterres called for an immediate global ceasefire to tackle the threat of Covid-19.[45] By June 2020 at least 171 states, along with religious leaders, regional partners, civil society networks and others, had declared their support for the call.[46] However, attempts to pass a supportive resolution in the UN Security Council were initially stymied by disagreements, especially among the permanent members.[47] It took more than three months after the initial call before the UN Security Council unanimously voted in favour of a resolution backing the call, and called on conflict parties to engage in a 'durable humanitarian pause' to last for at least 90 days.[48] However, military operations against groups designated as terrorist groups by the Security Council, such as the Islamic State, al-Qaeda and al-Nusra Front, were excluded from the UN Security Council ceasefire call. On 22 September 2020 the UN secretary-general renewed his call for a global ceasefire during his speech at the opening of the general debate of the 75th session of the UN General Assembly. He appealed 'for a new push by the international community' to make the global ceasefire a reality by the end of the year.[49]

Despite some armed groups, in addition to governments, initially acknowledging the call and promising to consider it, the reality was that in most of the armed conflicts the conflict parties either simply ignored it or their commitments were largely tokenistic, and the fighting generally continued. Between 23 March 2020 and 31 December 2020 conflict parties declared at least 29 ceasefires in 18 countries, although not all were in response to the secretary-general's appeal (see table 2.3).[50] Most of the ceasefires were unilateral declarations, and many were temporary or conditional; therefore, overall, they were generally only preliminary steps and with minimal material impact on levels of violence. Furthermore, despite often being

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[45] Guterres, A., 'The fury of the virus illustrates the folly of war', United Nations, 23 Mar. 2020; and 'Covid-19: UN chief calls for global ceasefire to focus on "the true fight of our lives"', UN News, 23 Mar. 2020. On the Covid-19 pandemic see chapter 12, section I, in this volume.

[46] 'Update on the secretary-general's appeal for a global ceasefire', United Nations, 2 Apr. 2020; and 'Statement of support by 171 UN member states, non-member observer state and observer to the UN secretary-general's appeal for a global ceasefire amid the Covid-19 pandemic', 22 June 2020.

[47] International Rescue Committee, 'UN Security Council fails to support global ceasefire, shows no response to Covid-19', Press release, 19 May 2020; and Gowan, R. and Pradhan, A., 'Is all hope lost for a global cease-fire resolution at the UN?', World Politics Review, 14 May 2020.

[48] UN Security Council Resolution 2532, 1 July 2020.

[49] UN Secretary-General, 'Secretary-general's address to the opening of the general debate of the 75th session of the General Assembly', 22 Sep. 2020.

[50] Also see Wise, L. et al., 'Pandemic pauses: Understanding ceasefires in a time of Covid-19', Political Settlements Research Programme, University of Edinburgh, Mar. 2021; Miller, A., 'Call unanswered: A review of responses to the UN appeal for a global ceasefire', ACLED, 13 May 2020; and Thompson, T. J., 'Searching for Covid-19 ceasefires: Conflict zone impacts, needs, and opportunities', United States Institute of Peace, Special Report no. 480, Sep. 2020.

Table 2.3. Ceasefires during the Covid-19 pandemic, 23 Mar.–31 Dec. 2020

Country	Declaration date (2020)	Parties	Type of ceasefire	Duration/ end date[a]	Recipro-cated?	UN call or Covid-19 related?
Afghanistan	23 Mar.	Taliban	Unilateral	3 days	Yes	No
	28 July	Taliban	Unilateral	3 days	Yes	No
Angola	13 Apr.	FLEC	Unilateral	4 weeks	No	Yes
	4 June	FLEC	Unilateral	..	No	Yes
Armenia/ Azerbaijan	10 Oct. Updated 17 and 25 Oct.	Governments	Bilateral	..	Yes	No
				..	Yes	No
	9 Nov.	Governments plus Russia	Multilateral	Permanent	Yes	No
Cameroon	25 Mar. Updated 10 and 25 Apr.	SOCADEF	Unilateral	2 weeks	No	Yes
				..	No	Yes
Colombia	29 Mar.	ELN	Unilateral	1 month	No	Yes
India	5 Apr.	CPI	Unilateral	5 days	No	Yes
	23 Dec.	NSCN-K	Unilateral	..	No	No
Indonesia	11 Apr.	OPM and TPNPB	Unilateral	..	No	Yes
Libya	21 Mar.	GNA	Unilateral	..	Yes	Yes
	21 Mar.	LNA	Unilateral	..	Yes	Yes
	6 June	LNA	Unilateral	..	No	No
	21 Aug.	GNA	Unilateral	..	No	No
	23 Oct.	GNA and LNA	Bilateral	..	Yes	No
Myanmar	1 Apr. Updated 3 May	Northern Alliance	Unilateral	1 month	No	Yes
				30 May	No	Yes
	9 May	Myanmar military	Unilateral	31 Aug.	No	Yes
Nigeria	25 Mar.	Regional intercommunal groups	Multilateral	..	No	Yes
Philippines	18 Mar.	Government	Unilateral	15 Apr.	Yes	Yes
	24 Mar.	CPP	Unilateral	15 Apr.	Yes	Yes
	Updated 30 Mar. and 16 Apr.			30 Apr.	No	Yes
South Sudan	9 Apr.	SSOMA	Unilateral	..	No	Yes
Sudan	31 Mar. Updated 1 July	SPLM/A–N (al-Hilu)	Unilateral	3 months	Yes	No
				31 Jan. 2021	Yes	No
	31 Mar.	Government	Unilateral	3 months	Yes	No
Syria	24 Mar.	SDF	Unilateral	..	No	Yes
Thailand	3 Apr.	BRN	Unilateral	30 Apr.	No	Yes

Country	Declaration date (2020)	Parties	Type of ceasefire	Duration/ end date[a]	Recipro-cated?	UN call or Covid-19 related?
Ukraine	22 July	Government; Russia; OSCE; CADLR	Multilateral	Permanent	No	No
Yemen	8 Apr. Updated 24 Apr.	Government	Unilateral	23 Apr. 21 May	No No	Yes No
	22 June	Government and STC	Bilateral	. .	No	No

. . = not specified; BRN = Patani Malay National Revolutionary Front (Barisan Revolusi Nasional Melayu Patan); CADLR = representatives of certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions; CPI = Communist Party of India; CPP = Communist Party of the Philippines; ELN = National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional); FLEC = Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda; GNA = Government of National Accord; LNA = Libyan National Army; NSCN-K = National Socialist Council of Nagaland (K); OPM = Free Papua Movement (Organisasi Papua Merdeka); OSCE = Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe; SDF = Syrian Democratic Forces; SOCADEF = Southern Cameroons Defence Forces; SPLM/ A–N (al-Hilu) = Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army–North al-Hilu faction; SSOMA = South Sudan Opposition Movements Alliance; STC = Southern Transitional Council; TPNPB = West Papua National Liberation Army; UN = United Nations.

[a] The duration/end date of the ceasefire refers to the declared length of the ceasefire. The extent to which this was realized (or will be realized for 'permanent' ceasefires) requires a separate assessment in each case.

Source: University of Edinburgh, Political Settlements Research Programme, 'Ceasefires in a time of Covid-19', accessed 5 Apr. 2021.

reported as 'Covid-19' ceasefires, only about 60 per cent of the declared ceasefires included references to the pandemic or humanitarian need.

However, global levels of armed violence did reduce during the early stages of the pandemic and continued to do so throughout 2020. ACLED recorded a decrease in certain types of political violence, such as battles and demonstrations, but increases in others, such as mob violence and state targeting of civilians.[51] Another estimate suggested a 58 per cent decrease globally in civilian victims from explosive violence between April and July 2020, compared to the same four months in 2019, as well as a 30 per cent decline in recorded global explosive weapon incidents during the same period.[52] However, these reductions appeared mostly to be part of the broader trend in declining violence (and the result of individual conflict contexts) rather

[51] Kishi, R. and Wilson, A., 'How the coronavirus crisis is silencing dissent and sparkling repression', *Foreign Policy*, 21 July 2020; and Pavlik, M., 'A great and sudden change: The global political violence landscape before and after the Covid-19 pandemic', ACLED, 4 Aug. 2020.

[52] 'Global explosive violence sharply declines during Covid 19, new data suggests', Action on Armed Violence, 12 Sep. 2020.

than being directly related to either the pandemic itself or as a result of the UN secretary-general's call.

By the end of 2020 it also seemed like most conflict parties had adapted to the pandemic, which now simply formed part of the wider political context of armed conflicts and peace processes. Overall, rather than being game-changing, the impact of Covid-19 on armed conflicts in 2020 was mixed. In a few cases there were temporary declines in armed conflicts, mostly due to decisions by governments or armed opposition groups to account for obstructed logistics and to increase their popular support. However, in many cases armed conflict levels persisted or, in a few cases, even increased as a result of conflict parties exploiting either state weakness or reduced international attention due to the pandemic.[53] The UN secretary-general's call for a global ceasefire had a minimal impact on these conflict dynamics. Some projections based on economic and development data estimate the pandemic may lead to future increases in armed violence in fragile states driven by rising prices and falling incomes.[54]

[53] Bell, C., Epple, T. and Pospisil, J., 'The impact of Covid-19 on peace and transition process: Tracking the trends', Political Settlements Research Programme, University of Edinburgh, 2020; and Ide, T., 'Covid-19 and armed conflict', *World Development*, vol. 140 (Apr. 2021).

[54] Moyer, J. D. and Kaplan, O., 'Will the coronavirus fuel conflict?', *Foreign Policy*, 6 July 2020.