



The Ploughshares Monitor

Summer 2009, volume 30, no. 2

The 2009 Armed Conflicts Report—preview

With 28 conflicts in 24 countries, 2008 saw a return to the prevailing downward trend in armed conflicts* that started in 2000, when Ploughshares documented 40 such conflicts. (In 2007 there was a slight increase from 29 to 30.) No new conflicts were added in 2008 and major armed conflicts in Haiti and Côte d'Ivoire ended. By the end of the year, 28 armed conflicts were being fought in 24 countries. Both numbers are the lowest that Ploughshares has recorded since beginning to track armed conflict in 1987.

While Haiti continues to struggle with security and humanitarian issues, the past two years have seen armed conflict casualty figures that are well below the 25-deaths-per-annum threshold that is required for removal from the Armed Conflicts Report.

Côte d'Ivoire has also been removed from the 2009 report because the 2007 peace accord has held: in each of 2007 and 2008 there were fewer than 25 armed conflict deaths. Côte d'Ivoire is one of the 15 member countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In recent years, seven of the ECOWAS countries have experienced armed conflict but, with Côte d'Ivoire's successful conflict resolution efforts, Nigeria remains the only West African country hosting war. This regional turnaround has been aided in several cases by forces from ECOWAS member countries as well as intervention by the United Nations.

The other change in this year's map sees Pakistan moving from the yellow category to orange—over 10,000 conflict deaths. During 2008 violence increased in this country.

Table 1: Geographic distribution of armed conflicts in 2008

Region	# of countries in region	# of conflicts in region	# of countries hosting conflicts	% of countries in region hosting conflicts	% of world conflicts
Africa	50	11	10	20	39.3
Asia	42	11	8	19	39.3
Europe	42	1	1	2.4	3.6
The Americas	44	1	1	2	3.6
Middle East	14	4	4	29	14.2
<i>World Totals</i>	<i>192</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>12.5</i>	<i>100</i>

Africa and Asia continued to be most affected by war (see Table 1), hosting 11 armed conflicts each, or over three-quarters of the world's total, leaving the three remaining regions of Europe, the Americas, and the Middle East with a combined share of less than one-quarter.

Between 1999 and 2008, 30 armed conflicts ended (see Table 2), with Europe, the Middle East, and the Americas realizing regional net gains. In Europe, two conflicts were resolved with one still active; in the Middle East six were resolved while four conflicts remain active; and in the Americas, two conflicts have been resolved with one still active.

Table 2: Geographical distribution of armed conflicts resolved between 1999 and 2008

Region	# of conflicts resolved	% of total resolved conflicts
Africa	11	36.6
Asia	9	30
Europe	2	6.7
The Americas	2	6.7
Middle East	6	20
<i>Totals</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>100</i>

Full descriptions of all 2008 armed conflicts are available in the *Armed Conflicts Report 2009* under the “Library” link on the Project Ploughshares website (www.ploughshares.ca). Project Ploughshares has reported annually on armed conflicts since 1987.

***Defining armed conflict:** For the purposes of the annual *Armed Conflicts Report* an armed conflict is defined as a political conflict in which armed combat involves the armed forces of at least one state (or one or more armed factions seeking to gain control of all or part of the state), and in which at least 1,000 people have been killed by the fighting during the course of the conflict. An armed conflict is added to the annual list of current armed conflicts in the year in which the death toll reaches the threshold of 1,000, but the starting date of the armed conflict is shown as the year in which the first combat deaths included in the count of 1,000 or more occurred.

The definition of “political conflict” becomes more difficult as the trend in current intrastate armed conflicts increasingly obscures the distinction between political and criminal violence. In a growing number of armed conflicts, armed bands, militia, or factions engage in criminal activity (e.g., theft, looting, extortion, drug trafficking) to fund their political/military campaigns, but frequently also for the personal enrichment of the leadership and the general livelihood of the fighting forces. Thus, in some circumstances, while the disintegrating order reflects the social chaos borne of state failure, the resulting violence or armed combat is not necessarily guided by a political program or a set of politically motivated or defined military objectives. However, these trends are part of the changing character of war, and conflicts characterized more by social chaos than political/military competition are thus included in the tabulation of current armed conflicts.

In many contemporary armed conflicts the fighting is intermittent and involves many levels of intensity. An armed conflict is deemed to have ended if there has been a formal ceasefire or peace agreement and, following which, there are no longer combat deaths (or at least fewer than 25 per year); or, in the absence of a formal ceasefire, a conflict is deemed to have ended after two years of dormancy (in which fewer than 25 combat deaths per year have occurred).

The above definition builds upon, but differs in some aspects from, the definitions of other groups producing annual conflict tabulations, notably reports from the Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University (Sweden), published annually in the yearbook of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

