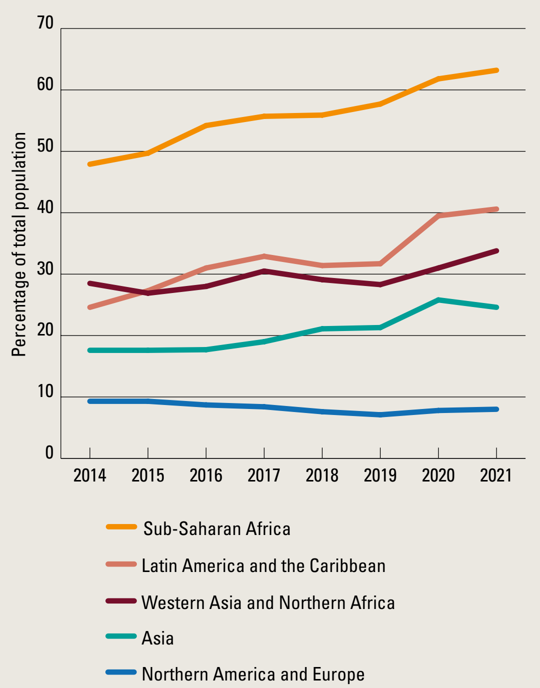
Editor's Introduction

In February 2022 – as the world was still reeling amid the disastrous legacy of the coronavirus pandemic – Russia's invasion of Ukraine brought about the most consequential inter-state armed conflict since the Second World War, hitting the global economy with yet another major shock by disrupting agricultural-goods and energy supply chains.[1] By adding to pre-existing inflationary pressures (through its impact on staple cereals, fertilisers and energy prices), the war fuelled poverty, inequality and food insecurity – the latter already at record highs following the pandemic.[2] Inevitably, these trends will exacerbate root causes of conflict and instability in fragile countries – particularly in those dependent on food and energy imports. Furthermore, the unprecedented humanitarian crisis and reconstruction needs created by the war in Ukraine will limit the international humanitarian aid and development funding available to many conflicts and crises in other parts of the world.

Figure 1: Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity as a percentage of the total population, by region, 2014–21



Source: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, FAOSTAT, Suite of Food Security Indicators, latest update: 6 July 2022, accessed: 23 August 2022, https://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data/FS

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Worsening food insecurity is a visible manifestation of how the global shocks of the coronavirus pandemic and the war in Ukraine intersect with the long-standing and accelerating climate-change emergency. Climate change and conflict appear to be increasingly connected in a vicious circle, with the former indirectly contributing to conflict dynamics (by aggravating their drivers and amplifying or creating tensions and grievances) and the latter reducing states' ability to mitigate the impact of climate change through adaptation strategies.

Geopolitics is centre stage

The Armed Conflict Survey has been monitoring and making sense of the global conflict landscape since the inception of the series in 2015, documenting the increasing complexity of conflict drivers, actors and dynamics, as well as the related intractability challenge evident in most ongoing conflicts.

One important source of complexity noted by *The Armed Conflict Survey* since its inception has been the increasing internationalisation of armed conflicts. While most contemporary wars are internal in their essence, a growing number and range of regional and global powers have been intervening in conflicts – in more or less overt forms – in pursuit of their strategic interests, further complicating internal dynamics that often already have a transnational character (e.g., jihadist Islamism) and multiple, complex drivers.[3]

While geopolitical competition had returned to the fore of the global armed-conflict landscape in the years prior to Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine, this development escalated this trend to a new level, with profound repercussions for great-power competition, geopolitical alignments and the sustainability of the current rules-based international system. Notably, the war seems to have marked an inflection point in the recent trend of Western countries' intervention fatigue and lack of strategic clarity on intervention, reconstruction and foreign policy – a trend that had provided opportunities for middle powers (including Russia) to assume greater roles in conflicts and peacemaking processes in recent times. The West's intervention fatigue was evident during the reporting period of *The Armed Conflict Survey 2022*, culminating with the full withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan in July and August 2021 following two decades of involvement in the country. By threatening security in Europe, the Russia–Ukraine war strengthened the West's cohesion (apparent in the concerted imposition of sweeping economic sanctions on Russia), prompting NATO and European countries to undertake a reassessment of their strategic priorities while also triggering a rearmament process in many of the latter. The new approach – to continental and global security, among other issues – adopted by Western actors will likely have wide-ranging implications for many ongoing civil wars.

Global energy-transition and climate-change-mitigation strategies are also becoming a kernel of geopolitical competition – a trend that is sure to grow in significance in the coming decades. Disagreements over mitigation responsibilities and competition for control of green-transition-critical resources and technologies will likely become increasingly important sources of inter-state tension and exacerbate current geopolitical divides. Notably, control of green-transition-critical minerals might drive increasing third-party intervention in civil wars in resource-rich, fragile countries and become a key consideration in non-state armed groups' (NSAGs') calculations.

The Armed Conflict Survey 2022 aims to provide our audience of experts, practitioners and policymakers with a strategic assessment of the contemporary global conflict landscape, shedding light on its domestic, regional and global drivers, making sense of current developments and anticipating future trends (including political risks and potential hotspots for conflict). In an effort to unpack the complex nexus between the domestic and geopolitical dimensions of most active conflicts, it maps conflict parties and their regional and transnational interlinkages in detail, focusing on ever-proliferating NSAGs as well as direct and proxy third-party state interventions and global influences. Our Armed Conflict Global Relevance Indicator (ACGRI) provides an additional filter for strategic analysis and prioritisation. In line with the International Institute for Strategic Studies' global character and strategic and geopolitical research focus, it benchmarks the global relevance of conflicts based on their geopolitical impact and repercussions in addition to their intensity and human impact. Our Regional Analysis chapters, covering trends of strategic importance, provide further insights regarding important regional dynamics. Trends included range from de-escalation in the Middle East and geopolitical dimensions of conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa to the regional repercussions of the Russia–Ukraine war in Eurasia, the geopolitics of fentanyl in the Americas and China's intervention modalities in Asia's conflicts. This edition also features Regional Outlook sections that outline prospects for peace, escalation and possible regional spillovers, as well as key political risks and likely areas of fragility to watch in the year ahead.

Climate and conflict

As in previous editions, *The Armed Conflict Survey 2022* includes a section dedicated to selected current or emerging global trends of particular relevance for the global conflict landscape. Given the increasingly urgent need to understand the complex interlinkages between climate change, climate vulnerability and conflict amid accelerating global warming, this edition includes a special feature on climate security. The section delves into three important aspects of the climate–conflict nexus, selected for their strategic importance in shaping the conflict landscape going forward.

The essay 'The Aftermath of War in a Changing Climate: Aligning Solutions for Climate Security and Peacebuilding' investigates the interrelations between peacebuilding and climate resilience and the considerable opportunities for aligning the peacebuilding and climate-resilience agendas in fragile and conflict-affected countries. Peacebuilding programmes that are designed to be climate resilient can support the mitigation of climate risk and build local and national resilience to a variety of shocks and stressors – including environmental ones – thereby also strengthening their sustainability. At the same time, well-designed climate programming in contexts of fragility can also reinforce peacebuilding processes by offering a less politically sensitive platform for dialogue, cooperation and confidence-building among parties. However, certain challenges will have to be overcome if the two agendas are to be brought together, including divisions among those working in the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding space and different timescales for peacebuilding and climate programming (the former usually being more short term and the latter more long term). Furthermore, to make peacebuilding increasingly climate resilient, more climate finance is needed from donors. This may be achieved by raising their awareness of the challenges that climate change poses to stabilisation efforts.

'Climate Change and the Instrumentalisation of Natural Resources in the Continuum of War: the Role of Non-state Armed Groups and International Responses' explores how increasing scarcity of natural resources raises their intrinsic value as a tool for military and political leverage during war and its aftermath, resulting in further environmental degradation and human insecurity. NSAGs' recourse to natural resources as an instrument of warfare and political power is a particularly worrisome development negatively impacting counter-insurgency efforts and conflict and post-conflict interventions, as well as efforts in environmental preservation and activities geared towards tackling structural fragilities. The many shortcomings of international rules (including international humanitarian law, international human-rights law and international environmental law) – in terms of applicability, compliance and enforcement, where NSAGs are concerned – call for innovative ways to engage with NSAGs on protecting natural resources and, more generally, ensuring the respect of basic international principles. Developments in the international-law architecture and the work done by several multilateral actors to engage with NSAGs are reasons for hope. The development of data-driven early-warning frameworks that can identify where conflicts involving resources are most likely to occur will also be an important step to reduce risks, strengthen resilience and prioritise action.

The last essay in this section, 'Transition in Turbulence: Geostrategic Implications of Climate Change and the Energy Transition', considers the geopolitical dimensions and repercussions of climate-mitigation efforts and the related global transition from fossil-fuel-based to low-carbon energy systems. Willingness and ability to respond and collaborate on climate change will differ between states depending on their emission levels, development stage, strategic priorities, resource dependencies, technological progress and ability to absorb the resulting social, political and economic shocks. It will also depend on geopolitical realities, relative geo-economic leverage and some sort of agreement between the developing and developed world – notably on who bears more responsibility to act and pay (and how quickly). At the same time, the urgent need to decarbonise will likely result in increased competition to control and dominate the resources and technologies needed for the green-energy transition, with important repercussions for the geopolitical balance of power and the global conflict landscape. This context will exacerbate the multiplier effect that intensifying climate change is already having on inter-state and internal tensions over scarce natural resources, especially in climate-vulnerable countries. The essay argues that addressing the climate emergency will require de-politicising the climate challenge, reducing energy dependencies and driving sustained, coherent and timely action, notably by creating strong incentives for great powers to collaborate.

Visualising conflict and instability

The data-rich analysis throughout *The Armed Conflict Survey 2022* is visually complemented by multiple graphic elements, including regional and conflict-specific maps, charts and tables, illustrating core conflicts trends during the reporting period and related data (including military events, interventions and data on humanitarian impact and forced displacement), as well as regional and global links and spillovers. An exhaustive categorisation and analysis of conflict parties, together with timelines of key military and political events for the period under review, provide invaluable background information on the conflicts reviewed.

In addition, the accompanying Chart of Armed Conflict provides a visual snapshot of climate-vulnerability and food-security trends in the 33 active conflicts covered in *The Armed Conflict Survey 2022*, complementing the insight generated in the Global Trends section and specific conflict chapters. In an effort to bring to life the complex nexus between climate vulnerability and conflict, the chart maps violent events for the countries in which conflicts take place together with the ACGRI's human-impact pillar and indicators of climate vulnerability and sustainability, food risk and food inflation.

A look into the future: regional outlooks for conflict

The Armed Conflict Survey 2022 complements its strategic assessment of conflict drivers and domestic, regional and global conflict trends with analysis of future evolutions in the global conflict landscape, exploring prospects for peace and escalation, political risks and potential flashpoints to monitor. This 'horizon scanning' exercise aims to provide forward-looking insights to inform the strategies of our audience of policymakers, practitioners and corporate actors operating in or near conflict-affected countries.

The outlook for conflict in the **Americas** remains bleak amid intractable root causes, the increasing political clout and transnational reach of criminal groups and rising regional and international demand for illicit drugs. However, a number of political developments have the potential to lead to some modest pacification in the region in the medium term, including a possible revival in negotiations between Venezuela's government and opposition and steps towards a full implementation and extension of the peace agreement in Colombia under the leadership of the newly elected president, Gustavo Petro. However, much deteriorated socio-economic conditions following the coronavirus pandemic, coupled with rising inflation and food insecurity, will provide yet more opportunities for criminal groups to entrench themselves in local communities while challenging state institutions' legitimacy and ability to govern. In fragile countries particularly vulnerable to climate change, such as Haiti or those in Central America's Northern Triangle, increasing inflation and food insecurity will result in heightened domestic instability and drive uncontrolled migration flows, with negative repercussions for regional security. The constant optimisation and reconfiguration of criminal groups' business according to profit margins and demand will drive contestation and violence around drug-trafficking routes (including ports) and markets, reaching countries largely spared from drug-related violence until recent years, such as Costa Rica and Panama in Central America (where drugs seizures are on the rise) and Ecuador in South America, where gang rivalries have produced large-scale prison massacres in recent years. Mexican drug-trafficking organisations' focus on fentanyl will continue, driving conflict as they reconfigure their business and areas of control accordingly. Although cocaine will remain part of their portfolio in the near term, a move to mainly fentanyl is a possible scenario in the medium term, with important implications for regional drugs-trafficking dynamics.

In **Europe and Eurasia**, the outcome of the Russia–Ukraine war, the largest inter-state armed conflict in Europe since the Second World War, will have far-reaching implications. While Russia's attempt to impose a pro-Moscow regime in Ukraine has failed, the outcome of the war remains highly uncertain amid risks that it could escalate to even more intense or destructive forms of conflict. Even Russia's minimalist military goals of occupying the entire Donbas plus two southern *oblasts* – Kherson and Zaporizhzhia – will not be easy to achieve given Kyiv's determination to continue fighting, Western military aid to Ukraine, widespread insubordination within the occupied regions and inherent flaws in Russia's planning and conduct of the offensive. Ukraine's success (and ability to decide when to start negotiations on a durable ceasefire on its own terms) will depend on the swift delivery of weapons from the West, as well as on financial and economic support provided by the European Union and the United States. Against the backdrop of little progress towards a peace settlement to stabilise the ceasefire ending the 2020 conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, the weakening of Russia following the conflict in Ukraine has increased Azerbaijan's room for manoeuvre, bolstered by Turkey's support. Although Armenia does not seem to have recovered fully from the defeat in 2020, lacking the resources necessary for a new round of hostilities, the risk of renewed conflict remains significant, especially amid signs that Azerbaijan may seek to gain control of further territory. The flare-up of tensions between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in April 2021, which saw more than 50 people lose their lives, highlighted not only the difficult bilateral relationship but also the larger issue of undemarcated borders in Central Asia. While several incidents (including explosions and a rocket attack in April 2022) have taken place in Transnistria since February, the odds of the war in Ukraine spilling over there are slim. Moreover, for as long as the war in Ukraine continues, it is unlikely that Transnistria's separatist forces and the relatively small contingent of Russian forces there will be able to launch a major offensive on their own. Georgia's Russia-occupied breakaway provinces – Abkhazia and South Ossetia – have remained calm so far. However, Russian success in Ukraine would reinforce Georgia's drift into Moscow's orbit, creating internal tensions between the government on one hand and the pro-EU opposition and part of the population on the other. Moscow's defeat in Ukraine would also carry risks for Tbilisi: if Russia turns to Georgia as a consolation prize, the latter would not be able to offer much resistance due to its much-reduced military budget and capabilities.

Most of the conflicts in the **Middle East and North Africa** are likely to remain in a state of protracted stalemate over the next year. However, the potential for escalation in Yemen and Syria remains high, despite a truce in the former and a military stalemate in the latter. A number of different scenarios could spark a renewal of fighting. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan continues to suggest that Turkey will launch a new offensive in northern Syria targeting the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The SDF has said that it may make common cause with President Bashar al-Assad if Ankara launches the operation, potentially reshaping and reinvigorating the conflict. Russia, which had been upset with Turkey's decision to block its warships in the Black Sea following its invasion of Ukraine, also urged Turkey not to launch the assault. The escalation potential also remains high in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, even as Israel's growing relationship with the Arab Gulf states means that it will likely receive less criticism for its actions. The Russia–Ukraine war's impact on global food prices could be disproportionate for the region, especially in the event of a global recession, worsening food insecurity and exacerbating current conflicts and fault lines of instability.

After two decades of sustained growth, the double shock of the coronavirus pandemic and the Russia–Ukraine war has complicated the outlook for **sub-Saharan Africa**, especially for fragile and conflict-affected countries. Conflicts in the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin and the Great Lakes region, fuelled by transnational conflict dynamics and porous borders, pose the greatest escalation risks. The radical Islamist groups active in these conflicts, which are affiliated to either the Islamic State or al-Qaeda, aim to progressively expand violence and their reach in the region. A trend of violence spillover from the Sahel to some of West Africa's coastal countries was evident during the reporting period, with attacks in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo. Further, the complex set of conflict drivers in the region – including chronic deficit of governance in the peripheries (e.g., in the Central African Republic and Sudan), multiple concomitant conflicts (e.g., Ethiopia and Nigeria) and overlapping local insurgencies and transnational jihadism (e.g., Mozambique and Somalia) – will continue to prevent decisive progress towards durable peace. The increasing number of inter-state disputes in the region are also contributing to instability: Ethiopia and Sudan engaged in deadly border clashes in the al-Fashaga Triangle in June 2022 in a dispute that intersects with the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam issue, which also involves Egypt. Tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda have also risen due to the presence of NSAGs in border regions. On a more positive note, some possible progress on peace and security could result from the ceasefire and upcoming negotiations between Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front. Moreover, under the newly elected President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, Somalia will hopefully repair some of its internal fractures. A new phase in the struggle against al-Shabaab is also beginning with the transition from the African Union peacekeeping operation – active for 15 years – to the AU Transition Mission in Somalia, which aims to transfer responsibilities to the Somali National Army by 2024.

Few of **Asia's** intra-state armed conflicts offer firm prospects for peace in the short term. Myanmar poses a severe escalation risk amid an insurgency in the central plains and the ascendancy of the People's Defence Force and its clashes with the military junta. Uncertainties over the rule of the Afghan Taliban and its influence on regional security loom over the outlook for peace in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Although the former has not relapsed into outright war following the Taliban takeover in 2021, the group has struggled to provide healthcare, education and financial services amid a deepening humanitarian crisis caused by food insecurity. Violence in the country has also been rife, involving groups such as the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), National Resistance Front, Afghanistan Freedom Front and the High Council for Resistance, among others. A deterioration of security in Afghanistan is possible in the short term, while increased insecurity in the country would likely spill over to Pakistan, where an emboldened Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, Baloch separatists and ISKP remain active. The India–Pakistan relationship also remains a potential threat to Asia's stability. In Kashmir, militant violence is unlikely to subside in the foreseeable future, while it is unlikely that Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif will be able to productively engage Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the Kashmir issue given the latter's hardline stance. Deepening tensions between the US and China over Taiwan also pose a major risk for Asia's security. Conversely, in Thailand, some room for optimism is afforded by the April 2022 agreement between the Thai government's Peace Dialogue Panel and the Patani Malay National Revolutionary Front, which provides the basis for further talks. Moreover, in the Philippines, security forces appear ascendant, placing Islamist militant groups under pressure in western Mindanao. Although this situation may not lead to a stable peace, a reduction in violence may be possible.

Notes

1 Russia and Ukraine are among the largest producers of agriculture and staple cereals in the world. In 2021, together they accounted for 30% of global wheat exports. The two countries provide at least 30% of 50 countries' wheat-import needs. Russia is also among the largest exporters of fertilisers, oil and gas globally. It is the third-largest oil producer, with a 12% market share. See Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), 'Impact of the Ukraine–Russia Conflict on Global Food Security and Related Matters under the Mandate of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations', 8 April 2022; and Carlos David Carrasco Muro, 'Ukraine–Russia War: How Will It Affect Latin America and the Caribbean?', World Economic Forum, 29 March 2021.

2 According to the FAO, 2.3 billion people (or just under 30% of the world's population) globally were moderately or severely food insecure in 2021, an increase of over 350 million people since 2019. The prevalence of severe food insecurity increased by 2.4 percentage points – to 11.7% – in the same period, with an additional 207m suffering from severe food insecurity. See FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2022. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022. Repurposing food and agricultural policies to make healthy diets more affordable.* Rome, FAO. https://doi.org/10.4060/cc0639en.

3 Third-party intervention has tripled over the last decade and reached record levels. See 'The Long Aftermath of Armed Conflicts', in IISS, *The Armed Conflict Survey 2021* (Abingdon: Routledge for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2021), pp. 22–8.