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Heidelberg Institute for
International Conflict Research

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Disputes, crises, wars: HIIK publishes worldwide report on political conflicts in 2017

Heidelberg, February 26, 2018. The global conflict panorama in 2017 was characterized by discontinuity and change. Not only did the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIIK) record numerous newly-sparked and ended conflicts, but the dynamics within single, sometimes longstanding conflicts was also marked by major changes, both in terms of intensity and conflict items.

With its new Conflict Barometer 2017, HIIK presents current data and analysis on the global conflicts of the past year. According to its methodology, HIIK recorded a total number of **222** violent conflicts, **five** fewer than in the previous year. While the number of wars (**20**) increased by **two**, the number of limited wars (**16**) decreased by four. Overall, the HIIK recorded **385** violent and nonviolent conflicts worldwide in 2017, excluding the currently **22** inactive but still potential conflicts.

The HIIK documented **six** new wars, **four** in Sub-Saharan Africa and two in Asia and Oceania. At the same time, **four** wars de-escalated from the previous year, three in the Middle East and one in Sub-Saharan Africa. Another **14** wars were fought worldwide with the same intensity. Last year, six new conflicts were observed in Ethiopia, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Iraq, as well as Qatar on the one hand and Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates on the other hand.

With **ten** wars and **three** limited wars in 2017, the Sub-Saharan Africa region witnessed the most violent conflicts and half of all wars worldwide. Overall, 28 of the 43 countries in the region witnessed violent conflicts. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, both the conflict between Kamuina Nsapu militias and the government as well as between dozens of local armed groups and the military in the east of the country escalated into wars. In the Central African Republic, after presidential elections and a decline of hostilities in 2016, violence again escalated in 2017. The number of displaced persons at 1.1 million peaked in the conflict over national power and the control of resources between anti-Balaka and ex-Séléka groups, which has been ongoing since 2012. In Ethiopia's Oromia and Somali regional states, fights between ethnic Oromo and Amhara, on the one hand, and ethnic Somali, on the other hand, erupted in September and escalated to a war after security forces had conducted raids during the state of emergency declared in October 2016. One of them, the so-called 'Liyu police', a paramilitary unit set up by the Somali regional state, killed a myriad of Oromo and Amhara in the respective regions. In the aftermath, tensions between the ethnic groups escalated. According to UNOCHA, more than 700,000 people had to flee their homes, with a significant spike after September.

The region of the Middle East and the Maghreb (MENA) saw **six** wars and **five** limited wars in 2017. In Yemen and Turkey, the wars between al-Qaeda on the Arab Peninsula (AQAP) and the Yemeni government as well as between the PKK and the Turkish government deescalated. Syria remained the country with the most wars in 2017 (3). Throughout the year, the Syrian government and its domestic and international allies achieved significant territorial gains, pushing back opposition forces as well as the so-called Islamic State (IS). After the capture of the nominal state capital of the IS by Kurdish forces, its sphere of influence was largely limited to the Syrian-Iraqi border area as well as individual Syrian governorates. In Afghanistan, the armed struggle against the Taliban and other Islamist groups claimed at least 3,4000 civilian deaths. Especially Kabul was a frequent target of attacks. In Iraq, violent confrontations erupted in the wake of the independence referendum between the Kurdish regional government and the Iraqi government.

The region of Asia and Oceania, recorded the most conflicts at 120, many of them conducted at no or low levels of violence. For the first time in ten years, the war in Pakistan between Islamist groups and the government became less violent. In Myanmar, the conflict between the largely Muslim minority Rohingya and the Buddhist government escalated. Attacks on Rohingya villages and human rights violations led to one of the largest refugee movements in 2017. According to UN figures, by the end of the year, about 620,000 people were estimated to have left the country. In the Philippines, fighting between the Islamist groups Abu Sayyaf and Maute as well as the government led to approximately 1,430 deaths and at least 400,000 displaced persons.

In the region of North and South America, the drug conflict between Mexican cartels and the country's government remained the only war in the region. Additional highly violent conflicts in 2017 were observed in Brazil, El Salvador, and Colombia. One of the most significant conflict developments was seen in Colombia last year, where the conflict between the FARC guerilla group and the Colombian government, which had been ongoing since 1964, came to an end as part of the transformation of the FARC into a political party. However, this development must be seen in the context of a significant proportion of former FARC members deserting the group and persistently high levels of violence.

In Europe, the highly violent conflict in the Ukrainian Donbas region remained the only war on the continent. As in previous wars, despite an official ceasefire agreement, no reduction in hostilities could be observed. Further violent measures, *inter alia* opposition conflicts in South-Eastern Europe and secessionist and autonomous aspirations in Spain, were also recorded in the region.

Since 1990, the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIK) is dedicated to the research, documentation, and evaluation of inter-, intra-, trans-, and substate conflicts worldwide. The annually published Conflict Barometer contains an overview of the current developments of violent and non-violent conflicts. The latest edition can be downloaded free of charge at www.hik.de/en/ as of February 28, 2017, 12 a.m. CET.

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