

THE DEFENSE MONITOR

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Staff Sgt. Bramley C. Church, U.S. Air Force

Rwandan soldiers line up to board a U.S. Air Force C-17 Globemaster III at the Kigali International Airport, Rwanda, for transportation to Darfur.

SPECIAL ISSUE:

THE WORLD
AT WAR



The trouble with the past is that it is always with us.

We may not be conscious of its presence, but it is nevertheless

always there – and always capable of haunting us.

COL. (RET.) DANIEL M. SMITH, SPECIAL TO CDI

FOR THE SECOND YEAR in a row, an unexpected major “national security” crisis threatened to reignite – again – into the latest round of armed conflict since the two countries were created 61 years ago. Headlines throughout most of December speculated about the added damage war would bring to an already financially weakened international system. Then, on Dec. 26, 2008, Israeli warplanes struck the Hamas-run Gaza Strip in what Israeli

Defense Minister Ehud Barak would label an attempt to destroy Hamas once and for all.

With a call-up of 9,000 reservists and tank units poised to sweep through Gaza – or what was left still standing after four days of air attacks – weather precluded the expected Israeli ground operation. As Jan. 1, 2009 dawned, negotiations were underway. The tanks were still in position, but world opinion was running

heavily against Israel. More ominous for Tel Aviv, sentiment among “the Arab street” on the West Bank was running heavily in support of Hamas and against the governing Palestinian Authority.

With Israel-Palestine on hold, the possibility of war between two nuclear powers emerges as the more ominous threat. Thus – after the year’s summary – this snapshot looks first at Asia.

THE WAR COUNT

The time-conflict graph (page 3), which covers nearly two decades, including the entire post-Cold War era, shows 14 “Significant Conflicts,” the same number as at the start of 2008, and breaks them down by region. Africa continues to endure the largest number of significant armed conflicts – five – more than one-third of the total. Asia now counts three significant conflicts, one less than at the start of 2008. The Middle East and the Americas remain at two each, while Europe increases to one. The global war on terror rounds out the total.

Another feature of these conflicts, illustrated by the dates (column 2) of the chart of “Significant Ongoing Conflicts” (page 5), is that all but one has its origins in the 20th century Cold War. Considering the extent of the

physical destruction and the depth of ethnic and sectarian hatred unleashed by the implosion of the Soviet Union and the break-up of Yugoslavia, it is amazing to have in 2008 only one armed conflict involving any of the 23 “new countries” that emerged from the trauma of political and social disintegration of the 1990s. That one war – Russia’s intervention in the dispute between Georgia and its two rebellious regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, was so one-sided it was over almost as soon as it began. But with tensions still near the breaking point, this war remains on the chart of “Significant Ongoing Conflicts.”

The second chart, “Low-Level Political Violence or Conflicts in Suspension That May Restart,” again contains 21 possible flash points as of the beginning of 2009.

ANALYSIS OF SELECTED CONFLICTS

Although this year’s traumatic event occurred in Mumbai (formerly Bombay), India, the context for what happened is incomplete without first looking to Pakistan between December 2007 and September 2008.

PAKISTAN 2007 - 2008

On Dec. 27, 2007, former Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was assassinated as she was about to leave a campaign rally in the Pakistani army town of Rawalpindi. Because Rawalpindi is a garrison town under direct military rule, suspicion fell on the military, specifically the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) organization. But it also fell on the newly “elected” president and former army chief of staff, Pervez Musharraf, who had ruled Pakistan since deposing the last civilian government in 1999.

The political fallout from Bhutto’s assassination was swift and far-reaching. As expected, the general election, finally held in February after a one-month delay, gave Bhutto’s Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) and former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif’s Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) control of the Pakistani parliament. The majority was suffi-

cient for a coalition of the PPP and PML-N to force Musharraf to resign as president of Pakistan to avoid impeachment on numerous charges, including illegally manipulating the Pakistan Supreme Court to confirm the legality of his “election” as president. In September, a month after Musharraf resigned, Bhutto’s widow, Asif Ali Zardari, won the election to succeed Musharraf, but Sharif then pulled out of the governing coalition, forcing the PPP to turn to minor parties to continue governing.

The chaos in Pakistan’s politics was mirrored in the military sphere. Pakistan army units fought pitched battles against what Washington described as al-Qaida and Taliban militants from Afghanistan who used Pakistan’s Waziristan province as a base for operations against U.S., NATO and Afghan security forces. American retaliatory missile strikes on Pakistani soil using armed drones,

which began in January 2006, became more frequent in 2007. Unilateral U.S. cross-border ground operations also increased during 2008, drawing public warnings from the new president of Pakistan as well as from high-ranking Pakistani military officers. Then, in an eerie precursor to what was to come in late November in Mumbai, India, a bomb – the second in a year – devastated the Islamabad Marriot hotel in September, killing 50.

INDIA November 2008

On Nov. 26, 2008, 10 heavily armed men attacked ten locations – among which were a railway station, a market, two hospitals, two hotels and a restaurant frequented by Western visitors – in Mumbai, India’s financial center. Seventy-two hours later, nine of the intruders, purportedly militants from the Kashmiri-based Lashkar-e-Taiba organization, who oppose ongoing India-Pakistan negotiations over the future of Kashmir, were dead or captured.

Predictably, the voices of long-time xenophobic figures in India immediately assigned responsibility to Paki-

stan's ISI, the Pakistan army and the Pakistani government in Islamabad for failing to hold Kashmiri militants in check. But for Pakistan, the Kashmir question is a matter of national identity, not a question of terrorism. That is a distinction many in the United States forget – just as many forget that in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) along the border with Afghanistan, day-to-day security is the responsibility of the various tribal leaders, not the central government.

What is worrisome about this latest terror strike – the fifth major incident in India so far this year (the others were bombings in New Delhi in May, in Gujarat in July and two in northeast India in October) is that Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, without specifying who, has intimated that at least some of the terrorists were “outsiders,” the code word for Kashmiri extremists. And indeed, as the enquiry went on, it appeared that at least some of the preparation for the attack was done in Pakistan.

The raid on Mumbai is but the latest drain on the reservoir of “good

will” achieved between India and Pakistan in the aftermath of the October 2005 massive earthquake that killed tens of thousands in the part of Kashmir under Pakistani administration. Washington's courtship of New Delhi with a bilateral agreement to help India expand its nuclear energy program has also engendered resentment in Islamabad and suspicion that Washington is not committed to helping Pakistan over the long-term. Pakistanis fear that once the United States gets what it wants – for Islamabad to eliminate anti-U.S. groups such as al-Qaida and Afghan Taliban along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border – Washington will drop Pakistan as it did after the Soviets were driven from Afghanistan in 1989. As 2008 ended, Islamabad began shifting troops from the Pakistan-Afghanistan border to the Line of Control in Kashmir, effectively the border between India and Pakistan.

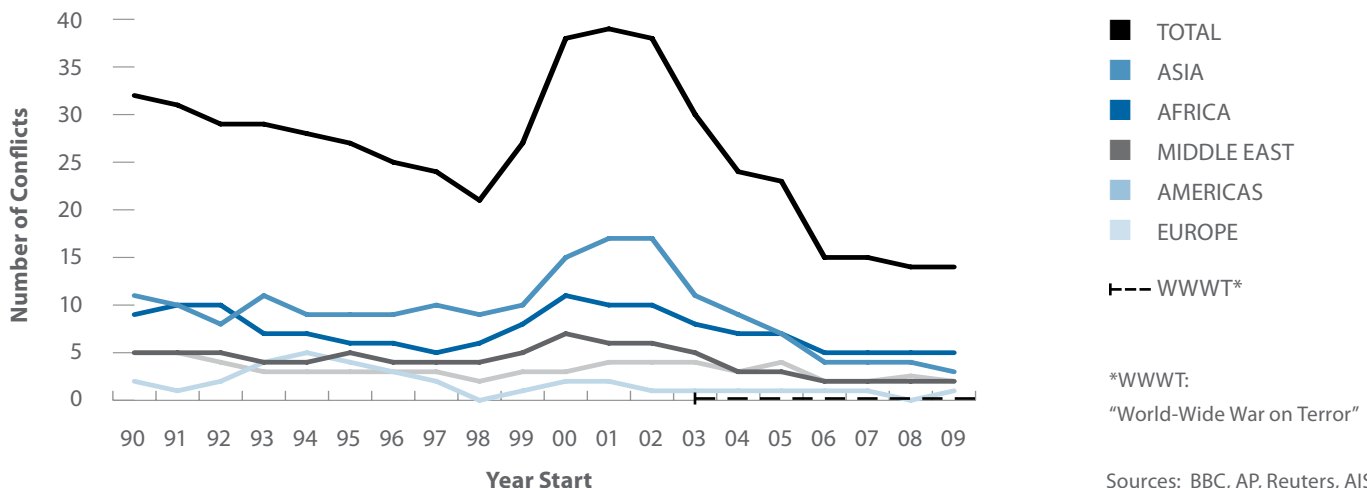
All this comes after a year (2007) in which reports of fatalities from terror incidents in Kashmir proper fell below 1,000 for the first time since 2000. Conversely, in India's volatile

northeast, for the second year in a row, fatalities will exceed 1,000.

NEPAL

Elsewhere in Asia, Nepal struggles to form and reform itself from a monarchy to a republic. General elections in April 2008, the first since a peace pact ended a decade-long civil war with the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN), gave a plurality but not a majority in parliament to the CPN. Ironically, the CPN party chief, now prime minister in a four-party coalition, found himself in the unfamiliar position of being the government confronted by an insurgency, this one in the southern Terai plains astride the main trading route to India. The small U.N. Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) is trying to assist in the political transition, but its influence is limited by the fact that its mandate runs for only six months at a time and invariably is renewed only at the last minute. (It next expires Jan. 23, 2009.) Even with continued violence associated with the political transition, Nepal's status changed from “significant” to “low level” in the charts.

Global Conflicts 1990-2009



SRI LANKA

Off India's southern coast, the virulent 36-year insurgency of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) lost ground (figuratively and literally) to the Colombo government throughout most of 2008. A major blow came Nov. 15 when government forces seized the town of Pooneryn on the island's northwest coast. Pooneryn has been the LTTE's military headquarters since its capture by the LTTE

in 1992. Having secured the LTTE's now former military headquarters, government troops resumed their advance on the main psychological prize of the operation: the LTTE's political headquarters at Kilinochchi. At year's end, Colombo's army severed a main logistics supply route of the LTTE with the capture of Paranthan just 40 kilometers from Kilinochchi. But the cost in human lives this year alone has been high. Before govern-

ment spokespersons stopped listing the number of daily fatalities in late October, the "official" fatality total for 2008 stood at more than 9,325 – with most of these termed "militants." Unless the LTTE can reverse its string of lost battles, 2009 may be the year that the insurgents quit the armed conflict and accept the invitation from Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa to begin negotiations that will end the conflict permanently.

EUROPE: RUSSIA & THE REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA

Europe was the setting for a very brief but highly significant armed conflict in 2008 – the Russo-Georgian clash over the legitimacy of Georgia's refusal to accede to demands for independence by South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Because of the long-range implications of this new willingness by Moscow to reassert its position as a world power, we include this encounter even though fighting had ended three weeks after the initial clashes.

The geography and issue at stake in the August 2008 Russo-Georgian war were the status of two break-away regions – South Ossetia and Abkhazia – seeking independence from the Republic of Georgia that sits on the coast of the Black Sea in the Caucasus.

It was only in November 2007 that self-proclaimed Russian "peacekeepers" finally evacuated the Republic of Georgia – more than 15 years after the collapse of the Soviet empire. Georgia had, all along, resisted Russian attempts to regain political and economic influence if not control of Moscow's "near-abroad." Tensions had been high for years between Moscow and Tbilisi, with the former accusing the latter of providing aid and safe haven for Chechen rebels trying to throw off the Russian yoke.

For its part, Russia provided political and economic support to demands for political freedom by South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Neither region was ethnic Georgian and had no reason to look south with any expectation of an equitable distribution of government services from Tbilisi. Moreover, the residents of South Ossetia wanted to rejoin their blood relations in North Ossetia, already part of Russia.

But Georgia's President Mikheil Saakashvili, elected in 2004, had pledged to integrate the two regions back into Georgia. When negotiations broke down this summer, armed clashes between regional "self-defense forces" and Georgian army "peacekeepers" became more frequent. Then on Aug. 7, Georgia's army moved against the South Ossetian positions and took control of its "capital."

An alternate version of events has Russian troops in North Ossetia conducting a major exercise. After particularly heavy bombardment of Georgian positions by the Ossetian militias, the Russian forces started moving toward the region, apparently assuming the Georgian attack. Whichever version is correct, the result was the same. The Georgian "success" was

short. By Aug. 15, effective resistance to Russian forces was ended both in the regions and in Georgia itself. Russian troops remained in Georgia until Oct. 1 and remain in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Negotiations between Moscow and Tbilisi began in November after an earlier attempt brokered by the European Union fell apart. Even so, tensions between the two antagonists remain high. The European Union has sent 200 observers to the region to monitor each side's adherence to the cease-fire.

The situation is further complicated by the United States' insistence that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) admit both Georgia and the Ukraine as full members. A number of observers are of the view that Russia's Vladimir Putin was looking for an excuse to intervene in Georgia to stop the momentum for Tbilisi's accession to NATO – and he succeeded in both outmaneuvering President Saakashvili and overpowering Georgia's small military. As November ended, the Russians seem to have also outmaneuvered the Bush administration which withdrew its insistence that NATO initiate "membership action plans" for Georgia and Ukraine.

Ongoing Significant Conflicts as of Jan. 1, 2009

MAIN WARRING PARTIES	YEAR BEGAN	CONTRIBUTING CAUSES*	OTHER FOREIGN INVOLVEMENT
U.S. Global War on Terror vs. "terrorists with global reach"	2001	(1970) Sept. 11 attacks Hijacked planes	U.N., multiple countries
MIDDLE EAST			
Iraq government and coalition forces vs. al-Qaida-in-Iraq and foreign fighters	2003	(1990) Invasion and Occupation (First Gulf War)	United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, South Korea, Italy, Poland, Ukraine, Denmark, others
Israel vs. Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, others	1975	Religious and Territory	United States, U.N., Syria, Lebanon, Iran, individuals
ASIA			
Afghanistan: Kabul government vs. al-Qaida and Taliban	1978	Ethnic, Religious, Territory	United States, U.N., NATO, Russia, Iran, Tajikistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan
India vs. Kashmiri militants	1986	Independence	U.N., Bhutan, Myanmar, Bangladesh
Sri Lanka government vs. Tamil Eelam	1978	Ethnic, Religious, Independence	India
LATIN AMERICA			
Colombia vs. National Liberation Army (ELN)	1978	Drug trade, Socioeconomic, Political	United States
Colombia vs. Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)	1978	Drug trade, Socioeconomic, Political	United States
EUROPE			
Russia vs. Republic of Georgia	2008 (1994; 1996)	Independence for Abkhazia and South Ossetia	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Georgia
AFRICA			
Democratic Republic of Congo vs. indigenous insurgents & foreign renegades	1997	Political and Socioeconomic using ethnic divisions	Angola, Uganda, Rwanda, Chad, Zimbabwe, France, Burundi, South Africa, Namibia, African Union, U.N.
Nigeria: Ethnic and religious communal violence	1970	Religious, Ethnic, Economic	None
Somalia: TFG vs. UIC; Somaliland, Puntland, other factions	2005 (1978)	Power, Ethnic	None
Sudan vs. Sudan Liberation Army (splinter) & Justice and Equality Movement	2003	Autonomy, Ethnic (Darfur)	U.N., United States, EU, NATO
Uganda vs. Lord's Army	1986	Power	Sudan

*Dates in parentheses are the years that violence first started that is traceable to the current significant armed conflict.

**Causes are simplifications and should not be regarded as the full explanation for what is often a very complex set of circumstances.

Again as 2009 begins, armed conflict in Africa centers on four long-standing battlegrounds: the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia-Somalia-Kenya), Nigeria and the other oil-rich countries in the west, western Sudan-Darfur-Chad and eastern Congo-Uganda-South Sudan-Rwanda.

THE HORN OF AFRICA

Somalia continues to defy all international efforts to pull together a viable central administration capable of governing. The Transitional Federal Government (TFG) still has little influence beyond Mogadishu, and even that control seems set to vanish, along with the Ethiopian army. The army announced in November that, after two years of propping up the TFG, it would leave Somalia at the end of 2008. This will likely mean that all of rural Somalia that is not within the self-proclaimed independent areas of Puntland and Somaliland will come under the sway of the militant Union of Islamic Courts or the latest threat to emerge from Somalia – pirates. The African Union has approximately 1,800 “peacekeepers” in Somalia – virtually all in Mogadishu – but they are hampered by the lack of equipment and the absence of any peace to be kept.

Pirating in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean off Somalia is a real growth industry. Through November 2008, more than 92 ships – including a fully-loaded supertanker sailing 450 miles off the coast – have been seized by pirates for ransom of the crews, ships and cargos. This is triple the number of ships taken off the Somali coast in 2007. (By comparison, there have been 71 attacks by pirates in the Strait of Malacca in Asia in 2008.) In

a November 2008 report, the United Nations estimated that so far this year the Somali pirates have been paid between \$25 and \$30 million in ransoms; the government of Kenya says the ransoms total some \$150 million. The United Nations finally responded to the increase in piracy by authorizing warships of a loose coalition of navies to engage pirate ships at sea and to go ashore to destroy supporting infrastructure on land. Notably, for the first time in its modern history, China is sending three ships and 200 special operations personnel to join in a U.N. maritime operation.

The instability in Somalia even seems to have affected Kenya, once considered a model of democracy and free markets. The issue, which threatened to tear Kenya apart early in the year, was a disputed presidential election that international observers said was conducted badly. Riots left more than 1,200 dead and 350,000 displaced. Under the mediation of former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, a power-sharing agreement between the two main contenders was finally implemented in April.

NIGERIA, GUINEA & OTHER WEST AFRICAN STATES

In Nigeria, criminality on the part of just about all parties involved in the extraction, transport, sale and export of oil – to the detriment of tens of thousands of desperately poor Nigerians simply striving to survive – continues to hobble the country’s integration and development. Overlaying this deficiency is the politics of ethnic and sectarian division that sees every election as a zero-sum struggle between the descendants of predominately ethnic Arab Muslim

invaders and the dark-skinned indigenous tribes of the south who are Christian or animist.

These sharp demographic distinctions play out in Nigeria’s central provinces such as Plateau where a dispute over who won the mid-November 2008 election for governor led to widespread violence rooted in the ethno-sectarian politics endemic in the province. After a single day of violence in the provincial capital of Jos, a mosque that was being used as a morgue contained well over 200 dead with uncounted other bodies in the streets, at the main hospital or already buried.

Meanwhile, in Guinea, which lies just north of Cote d’Ivoire, the last 10 days of 2008 were spent in great confusion. On Dec. 22, President Lansana Conte died, ending a 25-year-long rule that had left the country impoverished despite its great mineral wealth. Within hours, the army mutinied against the government and set up a National Council for Democracy and Development headed by Capt. Moussa Camara. The nation’s prime minister denied that a coup had occurred and said the constitution would be followed. He then acknowledged that the army was in control of the country. The junta issued a statement announcing that elections would be held in December 2010, the month that President Conte’s current term would have ended.

Throughout the 1990s, Guinea was stable and served as a refugee center for many fleeing the incessant warfare in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cote d’Ivoire. Now these three countries await the other shoe – violence from ethnocentric divisions – to drop in Guinea.

DARFUR

February 2009 will mark the sixth anniversary of the start of the rebellion against Khartoum by the people of Darfur who accuse the government of ignoring their needs and for not sharing either power (as Khartoum does with South Sudan) or oil revenue. February also marks the eighteenth month since the U.N. Security Council authorized a 26,000 strong combined United Nations-African Union peacekeeping force (UNAMID). Unfortunately, the mission has never had more than 9,200 actually deploy to the region, and 7,000 of this total were converted from the original African Union Mission (AMIS).

Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir continues to talk peace and harmony inside Sudan and with Sudan's neighbors, but the actions of his militias speak of war. A typical year was 2008.

January:

UNAMID convoy comes under attack from Sudanese ground forces and Sudan's air force bombs rebel positions in West Darfur.

March:

Clashes erupt along the north-south demarcation line in Abyei and become quite intense in May.

Sudan and Chad sign a peace accord ending five years of fighting. Two months later, Sudan accuses Chad of secretly supporting Darfur rebels who stage an attack on Omdurman, which sits across the Nile from Khartoum.

September:

Darfur rebels accuse Khartoum of new ground and air attacks against villages in western Darfur.

November:

Khartoum declares a cease-fire throughout Darfur that is rejected by the two main rebel parties.

Further complicating Sudan's international standing is a pending request – the first of its kind – from the chief prosecutor for the International Criminal Court (ICC) for the arrest of President Bashir on charges of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. The United Nations estimates that in the last five years, more than 300,000 have died from the war or its effects in Darfur.

EASTERN CONGO-UGANDA/ SOUTH SUDAN-RWANDA

Little has changed here in the last year except for the identities of some belligerents and some of the victims.

Congo has the largest U.N. peacekeeping force in place – 17,000 troops – and the U.N. Security Council is considering authorizing an additional 3,000 personnel. But even these will hardly be enough for a country almost the size of the United States east of the Mississippi. Although reliable statistics are in short supply, estimates by experts place the death total from the fighting and associated causes at 4 million over the last 11 years.

Government troops and U.N. peacekeepers are opposed by two

main groups: indigenous renegade Congolese loyal to Laurent Nkunda and his National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP), and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) led by Joseph Kony. Both operate in Kivu province in eastern Congo, with Kony also conducting raids into Uganda and South Sudan.

January 2008 had barely arrived when Nkunda's rebels broke a one-week-old cease-fire with Mai Mai militias allied with the central Congolese government in Kinshasa. In April and again in September, the CNDP captured the Congolese army base camp at Rumangabo, located near Goma in Kivu province.

Kony and the LRA were no better at keeping their word. Having accepted a government offer of immunity from prosecution for insurrection and help in reintegrating back into civilian life, the LRA's sudden strike in April against targets in South Sudan and in September against the Congolese was a shock. Since nothing was done to stop the LRA's depredations, they struck again during Christmas celebrations. At least 190 people were killed and thousands fled. At year's end, U.N. peacekeepers, the Ugandan army and troops from South Sudan were finally undertaking joint action to stop the LRA – which means stopping Kony. Long-time Kony observers believe he will never end his rebellion because the world community will never accede to his demand for immunity from possible ICC prosecution for war crimes.

THE AMERICAS

Colombia remains the site of the only "significant" armed conflict in the western hemisphere. After 44 years of armed conflict, what began as an

ideological struggle against privilege and corrupt government is now almost entirely criminal activity centered on the drug trade. The United

States, under "Plan Colombia," has funneled some \$6 billion over the last eight years to bolster President Alvaro
continued on p. 9

Low-level Political Violence or Conflicts in Suspension that may Restart

PARTIES TO CONFLICT	DURATION	CONTRIBUTING CAUSES*	FOREIGN MEDIATION/INVOLVEMENT
MIDDLE EAST			
Iran vs. Kurds	1961-	Independence	None
Turkey vs. Kurds (CPCK)	1961-	Independence	None
Israel vs. Palestinian Authority	1948-94; 2000	Independent State	United States, U.N., EU, Russia, Egypt, Jordan
Israel vs. Syria and Lebanon	2001-	Water, Land, Peace	U.N., United States, Turkey
ASIA			
India vs. Assam rebels (NDF and ULFA)	1982-	Independence	U.N., Bhutan, Myanmar, Bangladesh
India vs. All-Party Hurriyat Conference, Kashmiri militants	1989	Ethnic, Religious	U.N., Pakistan, United States
India vs. Insurgents in Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Nagaland	1980-	Ethnic unification in separate states	None
Myanmar (Burma) junta vs. minorities, Indian Assam rebels and National League for Democracy	1942-1988 2003	Ethnic, Drug Trade, Borders Democracy	United States, U.N., Association of South East Asian Nations
Nepal vs. Maoist insurgents	1996	Ideological	None
People's Republic of China vs. Uighur East Turkestan independence movement	1982	Independence	None
East Timor vs. army rebels	2006	Power	Australia
Philippines vs. Abu Sayyaf	1999	Ideological, Independence	None
Philippines vs. New People's Army (communist)	1969	Criminal, Terror	United States, Malaysia, Libya, Indonesia
Thailand vs. Barisan Revolusi Nasional and Mujahideen Islam Pattani	2003-	Economic, Religious	Malaysia
AFRICA			
Côte d'Ivoire vs. army rebels	2002-	Power	France, U.N.
Central African Republic vs. insurgents	2005-	Power	France
Chad vs. insurgents	2005-	Power	France
Ethiopia vs. Eritrea	1998-2000	Territory	African Union, U.N., United States
Sudan vs. Sudan People's Liberation Army	1983-2002	Ethnic, Religious	United States, Iran, Uganda
Zimbabwe: racial strife	2000-	Political, using Ethnic and Racial divides	None
EUROPE			
Republic of Georgia vs. Abkhazia and South Ossetia	1992-93	Independence	U.N., Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Russia, United States
THE AMERICAS			
Haiti government vs. former army and police factions and Aristide supporters	2004-	Economic, Power	United States, U.N., Organization of American States

*Causes are simplifications and should not be regarded as the full explanation for what is often a very complex set of circumstances.

Uribe's efforts to curtail illegal drug production that is the lifeblood of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the smaller National Liberation Army (ELN).

One new government tactic involves isolating distinctive factions in rebel organizations and convincing them to stop fighting. In 2008, the ELN splinter group "Guevarista Revolutionary Army" (ERG) agreed, after an eight-month negotiation, to demobilize its 45 combatants, bringing the number of guerrillas who have abandoned the battle lines in 2008 to approximately 1,500.

As if in recognition of Bogotá's success, a report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) in early November 2008 noted that the Colombian army had retaken large amounts of territory and that the FARC fighting strength had fallen 50 percent to about 9,000 (The ELN's strength is estimated at about 3,000). The question now is whether the Uribe government can build on these successes in light of possible cutbacks in U.S. aid, the downturn in diplomatic relations with Venezuela's anti-U.S. president, Hugo Chavez and a burgeoning scandal involving the recently resigned

armed forces commander.

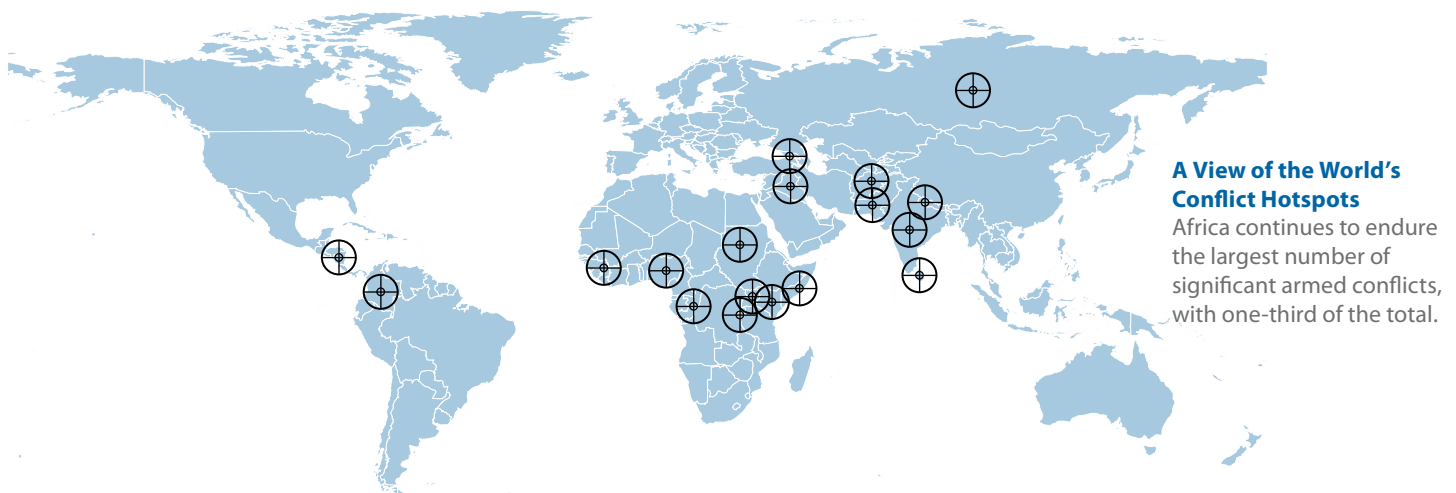
It is worth noting that the Colombian resistance at its start 44 years ago was not an armed movement. That change came in 1978. Just the opposite seemed to be the case in most of Central America in the 1970s and especially in the 1980s during the presidency of Ronald Reagan when the CIA was actively working to overthrow leftist regimes (Nicaragua's Sandinistas) while openly colluding with right-wing dictators and despots.

Honduras, for example, was more than happy to allow U.S.-backed anti-Nicaraguan government "Contras" to establish base camps along the border from which the Contras attacked Nicaraguan facilities and personnel. By the end of the Reagan presidency (January 1989), and most definitely after the USSR imploded in December 1991, Washington was shifting its attention to the problems associated with the collapse of the USSR and of Yugoslavia. Left to themselves, Central American countries gradually ended their civil wars. Perhaps the most notable event was the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas' Daniel Ortega in his 1990 re-election bid for president of Nicaragua.

In general, Central American countries also moved to de-militarize their governments and society in the 1990s. Nonetheless, three countries – Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador – sent troops to Iraq after the U.S. invasion in March 2003 (As of the end of 2008, El Salvador has lost five soldiers killed in Iraq). These same countries, along with Guatemala, Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic, signed up for the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) with the United States in 2005 after U.S. President George W. Bush assured them that all participants would benefit.

But as in other regions where the past is so visibly part of the present, history seems to be replaying some of the more brutal incidents from the 1980s. In 2006, after being out of power for 16 years, Daniel Ortega was again elected president of Nicaragua. Now he stands accused of using his office to steal the results of the November 2008 municipal elections. Rioting has occurred in Managua as rival gangs of political stalwarts contest possession of strategic traffic circles.

In neighboring Honduras, elections in 2005 gave the presidency to



the Liberal Party candidate, Manuel Zelaya. In late May 2007, he decreed that the country's radio and television stations play government propaganda for two hours daily for 10 days to counter what Zelaya termed "subversive propaganda" from unidentified sources. Zelaya then re-established diplomatic relations with Cuba, which elicited a strong negative reaction from the Bush administration. As if spurred by Washington's criticism, in August 2008, Zelaya joined the "Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas" (ALBA), the Venezuelan-led alliance of leftist leaders.

There was still one other replay in 2008 of U.S. involvement in Central America during the Reagan years that

merits comment because of a change in international law since the 1980s.

On Nov. 16, 1989, in the midst of the 12-year (1980-1992) bloody civil war in El Salvador, government troops trained by U.S. advisers executed eight people. Two were Salvadorans: a woman who worked as a housekeeper and her eleven-year-old daughter. The other six were members of the Society of Jesus – Jesuit priests.

International revulsion forced the government of El Salvador to investigate the murders. Only two soldiers were tried and sentenced; their sentences were commuted under a general amnesty. The amnesty was part of the agreement to end the fighting and restore civil governance.

Now, two human rights organizations are asking Spain's High Court to press forward with a criminal case against the then-president of El Salvador, Alfredo Cristiani, and 14 former members of an extremist right-wing military unit suspected of involvement in the 1989 killings. The authority cited for Spain's involvement is the universality of human rights, particularly the general obligation under provisions of the Treaty of Rome on the International Criminal Court (ICC) to hold accountable individuals who are alleged to have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity but whose national legal system refuses to investigate the charges.

THE MIDDLE EAST & THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR

This brings the "World at War" full circle to the general area where it started. Since summer, Israel had maintained an extremely severe blockade against Hamas in the Gaza Strip as retaliation for the continued rocket attacks launched by Palestinian militants against nearby Israeli villages. Only in the final week of the year was the blockade relaxed to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza. Even so, within 48 hours after the border restrictions were relaxed, the Israeli air force launched a large-scale attack on "Hamas facilities and rocket-firing points in Gaza. Israeli warships attacked Hamas positions on the coast and rammed a ship carrying medical supplies to Gaza, almost sinking the craft. The Israeli cabinet refused to accede to calls for a mandatory cease-fire by both sides. For its part, Egypt closed its single border crossing into Gaza until the two Pal-

estinian factions – Fatah and Hamas – re-unify. Meanwhile, the death toll in Gaza reportedly has passed 400 dead and more than 1,700 injured. Israeli fatalities from the mortar and rocket attacks are four dead.

Moving further east, Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran come into view, with Pakistan just over the horizon.

IRAQ

In Iraq over the last 12 months, the cumulative effect of the 2007 troop surge, the creation of the "awakening councils" and their anti-al-Qaida militias, the continuation of the unilateral cease-fire by the Mahdi Army and the effective completion of the ethnic and sectarian "cleansing" of Baghdad neighborhoods and whole villages that had been mixed prior to the March 19, 2003, U.S.-led invasion have cut the number of fatalities dramatically. The number of U.S. killed

dropped from an average of 75 per month in 2007 to 25 in 2008. Other coalition dead fell to eight for all of 2008 compared to 59 in 2007. Iraqi security forces and noncombatants reported killed also dropped precipitously in 2008 from the previous year – by 44 percent (from 1,830 to 1,066) and 72 percent (17,108 to 4,750) respectively.

On Nov. 17, after more than a year of negotiations between the Bush and al-Maliki administrations, the Iraqi foreign minister and the U.S. Ambassador to Baghdad signed a "security agreement" that, inter alia, called for the complete withdrawal of U.S. combat forces from Iraqi cities by the end of June 2009 and all military forces from all of Iraq by the end of 2011. This is slightly longer – 24 months – than the 16-month timeline that then-candidate for president Sen. Barack Obama pledged to follow for removing U.S. combat forces from Iraq.

Signing an agreement with a fixed timeline for withdrawing troops is a stunning reversal of policy for the Bush administration, which had steadfastly resisted any hint of “arbitrary” timelines divorced from conditions on the ground. Equally significant, since becoming president-elect, Obama has reconfirmed his commitment to draw down forces in Iraq. So it appears that the process is in motion; unfortunately, the “process” is destined to end in Afghanistan.

AFGHANISTAN

The drawdown in Iraq will not end U.S. military operations in the region. U.S. President-elect Obama will simply shift forces into Afghanistan to take on the resurgent Taliban and al-Qaida fighters who have wrested effective control of long stretches of the rugged and mountainous border artificially dividing the traditional

home territory of the ethnic Pashtuns between modern Afghanistan and Pakistan. Currently, neither Kabul nor Islamabad is able to exert effective control of the border population.

And as this war drags on, U.S. fatalities for 2008 stand at 155, the highest total (to date) of any year in this seven-year war. Allied fatalities are also at a yearly high of 138. Overall coalition deaths in Afghanistan are 1,042 of whom 630 are U.S. troops. Afghan security force deaths and the number of civilians who die simply because they are in the wrong place when something explodes are not known with any precision. But the people, and now the politicians, in Afghanistan are warning the United States and NATO that the growing reliance on air power as a substitute for troops on the ground must end because of the growing numbers of civilians killed during air operations.

THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR: IS IRAN NEXT?

Although the official spokespersons and the press in Iran rarely attribute the real source of money, training and weapons for anti-Tehran insurgents who infiltrate the Islamic Republic, there is little doubt that the United States is behind these activities. Tehran will not confront Washington directly – at least not until the president-elect is sworn in. What Iran could do, however, is fund insurgent groups in Pakistan’s Baluchistan province who are displeased by Pakistan’s subservience to the United States. The key logistics line of communications for NATO and U.S. troops in Afghanistan runs through lower Pakistan into the Khyber Pass and thence into Afghanistan. The Khyber’s 30 miles provides numerous possible ambush points against a slow-moving convoy.

CONCLUSION

The image of a ponderous convoy inching along a rugged, narrow road is an apt metaphor for the Bush administration’s foreign policy. More and more voices are advising Washington to strike a grand bargain with Iran that will recognize the regional and global interests of each other. The current world economic crisis provides an opportunity to alter the terms of engagement in the Greater Middle East from confrontation to competition – and possibly even cooperation. The generals seem to understand this better than the civilians in the Pentagon and the White House. No less a figure than Gen. David Petraeus, who successfully applied the Army’s counterinsurgency doctrine to Iraq, said there would never be a military victory in Iraq.

The same holds true for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

When the Bush administration shifted the focus of its “global war on terror” from Iraq to Afghanistan, it effectively tied success (or failure) in one theater to success (or failure) in the other. This regionalized the conflict beyond those countries and Iran to include Pakistan and India.

Westerners tend to believe that broadening the problem definition opens up opportunities that might not be apparent in a one-on-one encounter where the terms of reference suggest a zero-sum outcome. Given the seemingly static number of conflicts that have steadfastly defied solution, is war somehow immune to the broadening process? Is there some sort of “conflict floor,” a minimum

level of armed violence that humanity – indeed nature itself – must learn to tolerate? If so, how low can the number of conflicts go and how can we know when (if ever) this minimum (if there is such a figure) is reached?

Such queries fall into the category of eternal questions for which humanity has been seeking answers since we became conscious of being conscious. In the end, I suspect the answer will emerge not from an analysis of wars and warfighting per se but from the sudden realization that a deafening silence has descended on the world – just as happened at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918, when the guns of World War I finally all ceased firing.

But until then, the world remains at war on Jan. 1, 2009. ■



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