

Peoples under Threat 2010

Online Briefing
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Introduction

Over the last five years, *Peoples under Threat* has pioneered the use of statistical analysis to identify situations around the world where communities are at risk of mass killing. The *Peoples under Threat* index is created from a basket of ten indicators, all known antecedents to mass violence. On numerous occasions in those five years, countries that have risen sharply up the table have later proved to be the scene of gross human rights violations.

But there is perhaps one factor which more than any other can indicate a propensity to mass killing. It is a crude pointer, but one which is nonetheless often overlooked in the scramble for geo-political alliances or even sometimes in the name of reconciliation: those governments who are most likely to kill their own people are those who have done it before.

The risk from past offenders

The list of states that have risen most prominently in the *Peoples under Threat* table this year (see table below) highlights this problem of recidivism. It includes a number of states which have been the scene of past violence, and whose fall down the risk register in recent years has now suddenly been reversed.

A decrease in conflict in Sudan's Darfur region and the recent signing of a peace accord between the government and the Justice and Equality Movement, the main rebel faction, have given rise to new hopes for the human rights situation in

Sudan. However, the primary threat now comes to the country's south. A re-ignition of the north-south war, which until 2005 was Africa's longest conflict and claimed some 2 million lives, could be catastrophic. The last year has seen clashes in disputed areas and thousands of deaths in Jonglei from inter-ethnic fighting – fuelled by the Sudanese government, the south alleges. In Sudan's spring elections, a partial boycott by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, the main party in the south, has further heightened tensions. In the run up to a referendum on independence for the south in 2011, it is reported that both sides are re-arming. Sudan, which in recent years fell from 2nd place to 3rd in the *Peoples under Threat* table, has now risen again, with the new risk coming in particular to the peoples of the south, including the Nuer and Dinka.

Perhaps the most startling riser in the table this year is the Russian Federation, which has risen seven places. Although under-reported, conflict has escalated again both in Chechnya and in the neighbouring Russian republics of Ingushetia and Dagestan. In March 2010, suicide bombers believed to be from the North Caucasus killed 39 people on the Moscow underground, prompting Prime Minister Vladimir Putin to vow that the security services would scrape those responsible from the bottom of the sewers. The combination of circumstances is dangerously close to those that prevailed in 1999 before the start of the second Chechen war, which

Major risers since 2009

Rank	Rise in rank since 2009	Country	Group	Total
2	1	Sudan	Dinka, Nuer and others in the South; Fur, Zaghawa, Massalit and others in Darfur; Nuba, Beja	21.95
16	7	Russian Federation	Chechens, Ingush and others in North Caucasus; indigenous northern peoples, Roma, Jews	15.57
17	2	Philippines	Indigenous peoples, Moros (Muslims), Chinese	14.82
20	5	Yemen	Zaydi Shia	14.35
26	3	Equatorial Guinea	Bubi, Annobon Islanders	13.39
27	6	Georgia	Adzhars, Abkhazians, South Ossetians	13.37
36	17	Thailand	Chinese, Malay-Muslims, Northern Hill Tribes	12.35
42	7	China	Tibetans, Uyghurs, Mongols, Hui, religious minorities	11.77
49	11	Venezuela	Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants	11.10
51	New entry	Mauritania	Haratins ('Black Moors'), Kewri	10.97

caused the deaths of at least 25,000 civilians.

Russia's influence is also a central factor in the continued rise to the threat level in Georgia, which has jumped a further six places in the table this year. Tensions between the two countries over Georgia's breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia has remained high. An independent fact-finding mission sponsored by the EU concluded in September 2009 that the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia had been triggered by the Georgian offensive against South Ossetia, but found violations of international law committed by both sides. The prospects for tens of thousands of displaced ethnic Georgians from both South Ossetia and Abkhazia in particular appear grim. There have been few reports of human rights violations against ethnic Russians in Georgia, but stunts such as the simulated news report of a Russian invasion broadcast by Georgian television in March 2010 have not improved the atmosphere.

Across the globe, another old conflict threatens to escalate once more in the Philippines. Failure of a peace deal between the government and Muslim separatists in Mindanao led to renewed military operations in 2009. 57 people on their way to file election papers were killed in a massacre in November. Some peace talks have resumed with the return of international monitors, but the proliferation of different armed groups in conflict with the Philippines army, and violence associated with the scheduled elections in May 2010 both pose threats to communities in Mindanao.

In both the Philippines and in Yemen, which uniquely has risen in the ranking four years in a row, parts of the armed opposition have been linked with al-Qaeda, drawing international attention. The Yemeni government called on the West for more help to fight al-Qaeda at the end of the year, although its greater security concerns stem from the conflict with al-Houthi rebels in the north, a group pushing for autonomy for the Zaydi Shia community. With fresh fighting in September, aid agencies warned the country was facing a 'full-blown humanitarian crisis'. Cross-border incursions prompted the military involvement of Saudi Arabia in November. Some 250,000 people are internally displaced.

China has also highlighted the influence of radical Islam on Uighur separatists in the autonomous region of Xinjiang, pointing to the presence of Uighur fighters in the Afghanistan war. In July a protest in Urumqi led to days of rioting and vio-

lence between Uighurs and China's majority Han, millions of whom have moved to Xinjiang in state-sponsored migration. Nearly 200 people were killed in the violence; dozens of Uighurs later disappeared in a wave of arrests by the Chinese authorities.

Ethnic wars, religious wars?

The perspectives of the post-9/11 world have recast as wars of religion minority struggles that are in many cases decades old. Whether in South Sudan, the North Caucasus, Mindanao, Yemen or Xinjiang, there is a tendency, particularly in the United States, to highlight the religious aspects of situations which only a few years ago were regularly described as ethnic conflicts. In fact, it could be argued that both ethnic and religious differences have primarily been abused by politicians – national and international – either to mobilize or to stigmatize particular communities, and that the real roots of such conflicts lie not in religious ideology but in peoples' long-term economic marginalization and their aspirations for greater autonomy over their own affairs.

This point should be carefully borne in mind should widespread conflict return to these parts of the world. There are clear dangers inherent in exaggerating the religious nature of community divisions. For one thing, since 9/11 governments of every political hue have become adept at justifying the violent repression of minorities, particularly but not exclusively Muslim minorities, under the banner of the war on terrorism. At the same time, for governments or the international community to see complex conflicts primarily through a religious lens suits the agenda of Islamic extremists, who can claim impacts far beyond their often very limited military capacities. Finally, and perhaps most worryingly, if governments behave as if conflicts are all about religion, then increasingly they become about religion. And once religious divisions become entrenched, conflicts can be much harder to resolve.

All these factors are apparent in the continuing conflict in Afghanistan and the tribal areas of Pakistan, where MRG has reported that the local Pashtun community, as well as smaller minorities, have suffered mass displacement and serious human rights violations as a result of military operations. US and NATO forces have long admitted the necessity of negotiating with tribal leaders, but the appalling human cost of the war on civilians continues to radicalize new generations of

people who face grinding poverty and a lack of other economic or political opportunity.

In Thailand, which has risen 17 places in the table, political demonstrations in the capital have captured international attention. But the greatest threat of violence against civilians comes to the country's south, where a state of emergency has been in force since 2005 in response to the challenge from Malay-Muslim separatists. Credible allegations of widespread torture against Muslims have been denied by the government, but some 4,000 people have died in a conflict whose roots once again lie in grievances about regional economic underdevelopment and political exclusion.

Those at greatest risk

Highlighting the states that have risen in the table, where there are *new or increased* threats, should not, however, detract attention from those states that have remained at the head of the table, where peoples face the *greatest* threats. In Somalia, Iraq, Burma/Myanmar and the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as in some of the states already discussed, gross violations of the rights of minorities, including multiple or mass killings, are ongoing.

Despite claims of recent progress, Somalia and

Iraq remain entrenched in the top three. In Somalia, the Bantu minority and the Gaboye or occupational 'caste' groups have both fared very badly in the country's long-running conflict, a long history of marginalization being compounded by the lack of any effective security protection. In a war which rarely makes the front pages, they are truly Somalia's forgotten people. But other communities remain at risk too, including from the inter-clan rivalry that has taken so many Somali lives in recent decades.

In Iraq, a welcome decline in Sunni-Shia violence, and the formation of more plural political groupings in the recent elections are all cause for hope. But tension between Kurds and Arabs over disputed territories in the north now means that Nineveh and Kirkuk have become Iraq's most dangerous governorates. It is here that many of the smaller minority communities live. Turkmen, Yazidis, Shabak, and Chaldo-Assyrians have all suffered violent attack in the last year and remain at grave risk of mass displacement.

Can international justice help?

On 4 March 2009 the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for the President of Sudan, Omar al-Bashir, on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur.

Peoples most under threat – highest rated countries 2010

Rank	Country	Group	Total
1	Somalia	Darood, Hawiye, Issaq and other clans; Ogadenis; Bantu; Gabooye (Midgan) and other 'caste' groups	23.63
2	Sudan	Dinka, Nuer and others in the South; Fur, Zaghawa, Massalit and others in Darfur; Nuba, Beja	21.95
3	Iraq	Shia, Sunnis, Kurds, Turkomans, Christians, Mandaens, Yazidis, Shabak, Faili Kurds, Baha'is, Palestinians	21.90
4	Afghanistan	Hazara, Pashtun, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Baluchis	21.39
5	Burma/Myanmar	Kachin, Karenni, Karen, Mons, Rakhine, Rohingya, Shan, Chin (Zomis), Wa	21.06
6	Pakistan	Ahmadiya, Baluchis, Hindus, Mohhajirs, Pashtun, Sindhis, other religious minorities	20.55
7	Dem. Rep. of the Congo	Hema and Lendu, Hunde, Hutu, Luba, Lunda, Tutsi/Banyamulenge, Twa/Mbuti	19.91
8	Ethiopia	Anuak, Afars, Oromo, Somalis, smaller minorities	19.23
9	Nigeria	Ibo, Ijaw, Ogoni, Yoruba, Hausa (Muslims) and Christians in the North	18.58
10	Chad	'Black African' groups, Arabs, Southerners	18.15

The prosecutor's decision to seek an open warrant against Bashir followed the failure of the Sudanese government to enforce arrest warrants against two more junior Sudanese leaders accused over Darfur. Eliciting a storm of controversy, the prosecutor's move could be seen in the light of his oft-repeated comments that the ICC has a role not just in securing justice for past crimes but also in deterring future abuses.

Can the threat of being held accountable before the ICC stay the hand of Sudan's leaders over this defining year for the country's future? In particular, can the sort of mass killings that characterised the Darfur conflict and the earlier north-south war be averted? It is not only in Sudan that such questions will be put this year. Ever since it became apparent in 2003 that the ICC's first cases would be in the DRC, discussion of the Court's next move has become a feature of Congolese politics. While four Congolese warlords are currently facing trial in the Hague, another high-profile indictee remains at large, fighting in the current conflict in the Kivus as a general in the Congolese army.

Guinea, which suddenly rose eight places in the *Peoples under Threat* table last year, was later the scene of what the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights described as a 'bloodbath', as over 150 people were massacred at a demonstration in September. The ICC confirmed within a month

that its prosecutor had begun a preliminary examination of the 'serious allegations'. And in Kenya, where over 1,200 people were killed in inter-ethnic violence after the 2007 elections, failure by the Kenyan government to put those responsible on trial has prompted the ICC to approve the opening of a formal investigation. The Kenyan government announced in November that it will cooperate.

The Russian government called the Bashir warrant 'a dangerous precedent'. Like two other permanent members of the UN Security Council, the US and China, Russia has not ratified the ICC Statute, making its leaders harder to prosecute if they commit war crimes. But that does not mean that the Russian government is entirely immune from the processes of international justice, at least in its civil form. In a series of damning judgments this decade, the European Court of Human Rights has censured Russia for gross violations of human rights committed during the second Chechen war, confirming that the obligation to respect the right to life that prevails in peacetime cannot simply be ignored when a state faces a military threat.

The potential deterrent effect of international justice is still hard to gauge. Some of the key mechanisms are new, particularly with regard to criminal law, and the evidence base is small. But as mass violence threatens to return to some of the most notorious past killing grounds, this year will be a signal test.

How is *Peoples under Threat* calculated?

Since the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, our ability to identify those situations most likely to lead to genocide or mass killing has improved. A number of comparative studies of the factors preceding historic episodes of political mass killing had been undertaken since the 1970s, including by Helen Fein and Ted Robert Gurr, but it was not until the 1990s that researchers such as Rudolf Rummel and Matthew Krain pioneered quantitative longitudinal analysis of a wide range of such factors, enabling the testing of different causal hypotheses. Rummel, for example, showed the very strong relationship between concentration of government power and state mass murder; Krain demonstrated the correlation between exist-

ing armed conflict or political instability and the onset and severity of mass killing.

Following the early work of the Clinton administration's policy initiative on genocide early warning and prevention, Professor Barbara Harff, a senior consultant with the US State Failure Task Force, constructed and tested models of the antecedents of genocide and political mass murder and her results were published in 2003 ('Assessing Risks of Genocide and Political Mass Murder since 1955', *American Political Science Review* 97, February 2003). Her optimal model identifies six preconditions that make it possible to distinguish, with 74 per cent accuracy, between internal wars and regime collapses in the period 1955 - 1997 that did, and those that did not, lead to genocide

and political mass murder (politicide). The six preconditions are: political upheaval; previous genocides or politicides; exclusionary ideology of the ruling elite; autocratic nature of the regime; minority character of the ruling elite; and low trade openness.

Minority Rights Group International has drawn on these research findings to construct the *Peoples under Threat* table, although responsibility for the final table is exclusively our own. *Peoples under Threat* is specifically designed to identify the risk of genocide, mass killing or other systematic violent repression, unlike most other early warning tools, which focus on violent conflict as such. Its primary application is civilian protection.

Indicators of conflict are included in the table's construction, however, as most, although not all, episodes of mass ethnic or religious killing occur during armed conflicts. War provides the state of emergency, domestic mobilization and justification, international cover, and in some cases the military and logistic capacity, that enable massacres to be carried out. Some massacres, however, occur in peacetime, or may accompany armed conflict from its inception, presenting a problem to risk models that focus exclusively on current conflicts. In addition, severe and even violent repression of minorities may occur for years before the onset of armed conflict provides the catalyst for larger scale killing.

The statistical indicators used all relate to the state. The state is the basic unit of enquiry, rather than particular ethnic or religious groups at risk, as governments or militias connected to the government are responsible for most cases of genocidal violence. Formally, the state will reserve to itself the monopoly over the means of violence, so that where non-state actors are responsible for widespread or continued killing, it usually occurs with either the complicity of the state or in a 'failed state' situation where the rule of law has disintegrated. Certain characteristics at the level of the state will greatly increase the likelihood of atrocity, including habituation to illegal violence among the armed forces or police, prevailing impunity for human rights violations, official tolerance or encouragement of hate speech against particular

groups, and in extreme cases, prior experience of mass killing. Egregious episodes of mass killing targeted principally at one group have also seen other groups deliberately decimated or destroyed.

However, some groups may experience higher levels of discrimination and be at greater risk than others in any given state. Minority Rights Group International has identified those groups in each state which we believe to be under most threat. (This does not mean that other groups or indeed the general population may not also be at some risk.) It should be noted that although these groups are most often minorities, in some cases ethnic or religious majorities will also be at risk and in relevant cases are therefore also listed in the table. In some cases, all the groups in the country are at risk of ethnic or sectarian killing.

One indicator that has been tested and discarded by a number of studies is the general level of ethnic or cultural diversity in a society. Krain did not find any correlation between 'ethnic fractionalization' and the onset of genocide or political mass killing. Similarly, neither of the patterns of ethnic diversity tested by Harff had any effect on the likelihood of mass killing (although she did find the minority character of the ruling elite to be significant). These findings are supported by research on the relationship between diversity and conflict.

The overall measure is based on a basket of ten indicators. These include indicators of democracy or good governance from the World Bank, conflict indicators from the Center for Systemic Peace and other leading global conflict research institutes, indicators of group division or elite factionalization from the Fund for Peace and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the State Failure Task Force data on prior genocides and politicides, and the country credit risk classification published by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (as a proxy for trade openness). For citations and further information, see the notes to the table. For a fuller discussion of the methodology, see *State of the World's Minorities 2006*.

Based on current indicators from authoritative sources, *Peoples under Threat* seeks to identify those groups or peoples most under threat in 2010.