

Peoples under Threat

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Is war contagious? The question is an old one, but the events of the last year have seen it posed with renewed urgency as the long-term decline in global rates of armed conflict has now stalled.

In the 1990s, many of the new conflicts that erupted shared the same proximate cause: the fall of the Soviet Union. Much of the killing on the ground was driven by policies of ethnic nationalism but as, one by one, those conflicts were resolved or contained, they appeared in retrospect as the death rattle of the bi-polar world, or even, in the words of some commentators, as the necessary price of democratization. Optimists also pointed to the communications revolution and claimed that the real-time transmission of images of terrible suffering on the world's television and computer screens had made it impossible for international leaders to avoid taking joint action to resolve conflict. In the last years of the century, there was a series of internationally mediated settlements and a huge increase in UN peacekeeping operations to contain conflict. Up close, war was just too terrible for us to allow it to continue. The steady overall decline in global conflict that followed – and that continued despite the launch of the 'war on terror' – provided comfort to that viewpoint.

But 2007 threatens to mark a turning point. Indeed, a dispassionate observer of world events over the last 18 months, watching the tentacular proliferation of conflict in the Horn and Central Africa, the Middle East and western Asia, might be forced to conclude, like the chaplain in *Mother Courage*, that 'war always finds a way'.

War certainly has its own dynamics, which cannot even be controlled by the world's superpower, as the US has tragically demonstrated in Iraq. In that country, as in most of the others where conflict has spread over the last year, it is the way in which those dynamics act on ethnic and religious divisions to engulf ever wider and larger populations, within and across borders, that has fuelled the killing. The lessons of the 1990s already seem to have been forgotten.

This is the third year that Minority Rights Group International (MRG) has compiled the Peoples under Threat table (see Reference section, Table 1, pp. 162–7). Based on recent advances in political science it seeks to identify which of the world's peoples are currently under most threat of genocide, mass killing or other systematic violent repression.

The spread of conflict and new threats in 2008

The major risers in the table this year are listed overleaf. In most of these cases, the states concerned border a state where there is an existing armed conflict. Well-known factors in the international spread of conflict include refugee flows and the proliferation of small arms. In many of the highlighted cases, however, including Chad, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Iran and Lebanon, the determining factor appears to be the export of the ethnic dynamics of conflict to kin populations across borders.

The continuing tragedy in Darfur in Sudan is exerting an ever greater impact on the neighbouring states of Chad and the Central African Republic. To the 240,000 Sudanese refugees currently in eastern Chad can be added a further 170,000 internally displaced Chadians. Yet while for a time the precarious situation in eastern Chad could be blamed primarily on the mass refugee flows that began in 2004, and cross-border attacks from Janjaweed horsemen, over the last year the fighting has increasingly been between local communities, nonetheless replicating a model familiar from Darfur. What started as a local reaction to Janjaweed attacks has become a generalized inter-communal conflict pitting 'black' *toroboro* militias against Arab fighters, with civilian communities on both sides bearing most of the casualties. As the conflict has escalated, both Chad and Sudan have accused each other of supporting rebel cross-border attacks. A bilateral agreement in May 2007 to stop such attacks appeared to have little effect. Chad's President Idriss Déby, who survived an armed rebellion in 2006, held talks with key rebels in October 2007 even as a state of emergency was declared over much of the east and north of the country.

Eastern Chad has also received tens of thousands of refugees fleeing fighting in the Central African Republic (CAR). The insurgency in the CAR dates from when President Bozize took power in a coup in 2003, but has gathered intensity over the last year with the involvement of militias supported by Sudan. CAR armed forces have responded with a campaign of violence against civilians in the north, often targeting the Kaba, the ethnic group of the former president. In all, some 270,000 people have been displaced.

Ethiopia has risen further up the table following its military involvement in Somalia. In December

2006 the Ethiopian army, supported by the USA, invaded Somalia in support of the Transitional Federal Government, in order to overthrow the *de facto* rule of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU). By February, the UNHCR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) reported that some 50,000 Somali refugees fleeing the fighting had crossed the border into Ethiopia. With them came significant numbers of small arms and tales of what the Ethiopians were doing to their country, invigorating a long-running insurgency in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia bordering Somalia. Following increasingly daring attacks by the Ogaden National Liberation Front in April and May, Ethiopian armed forces mounted a major counter-insurgency campaign in the Ogaden in June, resulting in widespread allegations of abuses against ethnic Somali civilians. With the military involvement in Somalia continuing, and renewed tension in Ethiopia's long-running border dispute with Eritrea, the government is under pressure. At the same time, serious ethnic tension persists in other areas of the country. In her 2007 mission report on Ethiopia, the UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues highlighted the situation in Gambella state, bordering Sudan, where human rights violations continue, including against the Anuak.

The situation in Somalia and Ethiopia also threatens to have an impact on the small state of Djibouti, which was affected by drought in 2007. Djibouti has suffered in the past from inter-ethnic violence between Somali-speaking Issas and Afars, who have a kin population in Ethiopia. The security situation in the country is closely connected with the supply of foreign aid and the presence of large French and US military bases, but in 2006 a UN report accused Djibouti, as well as Eritrea, of illegally arming the ICU in Somalia. Although part of the rise is due to the absence of data on some of the indicators last year, Djibouti has still risen significantly in the Peoples under Threat table.

The cases of Iran and Uzbekistan, as well as Pakistan (which is now ranked seventh in the overall table), all affected by cross-border conflict, are considered below. Another striking riser in the table is Lebanon, already seriously destabilized by the 2006 Hezbollah–Israel war. Lebanon seems as far as ever from escaping the influence of its neighbours and the wider Arab–Israeli conflict. Fighting in May–September 2007 between the Lebanese army

and a new Sunni jihadist group named Fatah al-Islam, based in the Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp, claimed at least 450 lives and displaced up to 30,000 Palestinian refugees. The professed aim of Fatah al-Islam, which was composed of some Palestinians and a large proportion of foreign militants, was to bring religion back to the Palestinians, but the mainstream Palestinian leadership in the region distanced itself from the group. However, given the humanitarian impact of the fighting, the continuing disenfranchisement of Palestinians within Lebanon, and the possibility of communal conflict between Fatah al-Islam or a successor group and Shi'a supporters of Hezbollah, the situation remains of grave concern.

The continuing march up the table of Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe is mainly driven by endogenous factors. The conflict between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam escalated during 2007 with major Sri Lankan army operations in the east and north of the country in January, March and July leading to the displacement of tens of thousands of mainly Tamil civilians. A programme of expulsions of Tamils from the capital Colombo was halted by a court order in June.

The ethnic dimension of the crisis in Zimbabwe has received little comment but may be becoming more pronounced. Although the opposition Movement for Democratic Change emphasizes its inclusive character, it has a higher proportion of Ndebele among its activists than the ruling ZANU-PF, and there were noted cases of ethnic discrimination in both the government's slum clearance programmes and its distribution of food aid. In the mid-1980s between 10,000 and 20,000 Ndebele were believed killed in the course of Zimbabwean military operations in Matabeleland.

The inter-ethnic violence which commenced in Kenya following disputed results in the December presidential election was not widely anticipated, although MRG had warned of serious inter-ethnic tension in Kenya for a number of years, particularly following the failure to agree a new inclusive constitution. Opposition resentment at the dominance of the Kikuyu, the ethnic group of President Mwai Kibaki, drove the early violence, but the situation has quickly deteriorated. Inter-ethnic attacks, revenge killings and forced displacement

have targeted a number of groups, including the Kikuyu, Luhya, Luo and Kalenjin, particularly in west Kenya and the Rift Valley, as long-running disputes over land use and ownership have been brought to a head. Indigenous groups such as the Ogiek have also suffered as militias, profiting from the general insecurity, have attempted land grabs. As a result of these events, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan was brought in to mediate reconciliation talks, and Kenya has risen 14 places in the PUT table. However, the probability of the situation deteriorating farther in the immediate future will partly depend on whether the police – already accused of using excessive violence against demonstrators – and the armed forces become drawn into the inter-ethnic conflict. In the long

term, fair political participation for the different groups and a concerted attempt to resolve equitably the disputes over land will be the key.

In the overall Peoples under Threat table for 2008 (pp. 50, 161–7), the top six positions are taken by the same states as last year: Somalia, Iraq, Sudan, Afghanistan, Burma/Myanmar and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In each of these states, further major episodes of inter-ethnic, inter-clan or sectarian killing in 2008 are highly probable if not inevitable.

The situation in Somalia deteriorated further in 2007. Following the ouster of the ICU, the Transitional Federal Government, backed by the Ethiopian army, launched an offensive against ICU supporters in February. Indiscriminate shelling

Major risers since 2007

Rank	Rise in rank since 2007	Country	Group	Total
7	1	Pakistan	Ahmaddiya, Baluchis, Hindus, Mohhajirs, Pashtun, Sindhis, other religious minorities	19.16
9	4	Ethiopia	Anuak, Afars, Oromo, Somalis, smaller minorities	17.77
10	14	Chad	'Black African' groups, Arabs, Southerners	17.62
11	3	Sri Lanka	Tamils, Muslims	16.63
12	8	Iran	Arabs, Azeris, Baha'is, Baluchis, Kurds, Turkomans	15.71
13	25	Central African Republic	Kaba (Sara), Mboum, Mbororo, Aka	15.59
14	21	Lebanon	Druze, Maronite Christians, Palestinians, Shia, Sunnis	15.29
22	3	Zimbabwe	Ndebele, Europeans, political/social targets	14.26
25	3	Uzbekistan	Tajiks, Islamic political groups, religious minorities, Karakalpaks, Russians	13.73
28	5	Yemen	Zaydi Shia	13.52
40	30*	Djibouti	Afars	11.64
51	14	Kenya	Borana, Kalenjin, Kikuyu, Luyha, Luo, Somalis, Turkana, Endorois, Masai, Ogiek, other indigenous groups	11.10

* Disproportionately high due to the absence of data on some of the indicators in 2007



Left: Indigenous girl from a community affected by commercial logging, Province Orientale, Democratic Republic of Congo. Mark Lattimer/MRG

that villagers in the increasingly militarized Chin state were being forced to take part in pro-government rallies, or face heavy fines, leading some to flee to neighbouring India.

Despite largely successful national elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 2006, and the presence of the UN's largest peacekeeping force, armed conflict has escalated once again in the east of the country. Over 350,000 people have fled fighting in North Kivu with forces of the dissident General Laurent Nkunda, who claims to be protecting Congolese Tutsis. Nkunda points to the continued presence in the Kivus of Rwandan Hutu rebels, who typically live by pillaging from the local population, and most Congolese believe he is backed by the Rwandan government. The eastern DRC in fact presents a rather extreme case of exported conflict, with Rwanda itself enjoying peace and rapid development, attested by its fall of 15 places in the Peoples under Threat table.

Dropping out of the top of the table this year along with Rwanda is the Russian Federation, where the Chechen conflict has partly been contained. The situation remains precarious, however, as it does in Angola and Burundi, whose risk profile has improved on last year. More promising for the long-term is the situation in Liberia (which fell 23 places in the table since last year) and in Sierra Leone (15 places), both of which continue to recover from past conflicts.

The purpose of the Peoples under Threat table, as explained above, is to identify those country situations where there is a significant risk of mass killing or other systematic violent repression of particular ethnic or religious groups. This is not to say that such repression will occur, but that there is an increased probability that it *may* occur in the near or medium-term future (bearing in mind that for those countries at the head of the table, the violence is ongoing). But as this is now the third year that the Peoples under Threat table has been compiled, a brief assessment can be made of its performance as a predictive tool.

Pakistan and Sri Lanka, the top two countries in the table of major risers last year, faced a major increase in violent political instability and ethnic

killing in 2007. To a lesser degree, this was also the case with Turkey and Iran. In Lebanon, although violence did not reach the level of the international Hezbollah–Israel conflict of 2006, there was a major new upsurge of conflict in a Palestinian refugee camp. In Guinea, a political crisis led to a state of emergency being declared in early 2007. In three other situations, Yemen, Thailand and Israel/OPT, serious inter-ethnic or sectarian killing continued. Of the 10 states listed in the table of major risers, only in Haiti (where socio-political cleavages have been more prominent in conflict than ethnic or religious factors) could the situation be said to have partly stabilized.

US foreign policy and the spread of conflict

In 1937, in his so-called 'quarantine speech', President Franklin D. Roosevelt sought to counter the prevailing mood of isolationism in the United States. He argued that if war came again to Europe, 'let no one imagine that America will escape'. He went on:

'Nations are fomenting and taking sides in civil warfare in nations that have never done them any harm. Nations claiming freedom for themselves deny it to others... The peace-loving nations must make a concerted effort in opposition to those violations of treaties and those ignorings of human instincts which today are creating a state of international anarchy and instability... When an epidemic of physical disease starts to spread, the community approves and joins in a quarantine of the patients in order to protect the health of the community. War is a contagion... There must be positive endeavours to preserve peace.'

His arguments resonate for US foreign policy today, although whether they provide more support for contemporary interventionists or multilateralists is not entirely clear. The dominant strand in US foreign policy after 9/11 was a belligerent interventionism which aimed at achieving a positive domino effect in world regions that were perceived as a threat. In November 2003, for example, President Bush claimed that: 'The establishment of a free Iraq in the heart of the Middle East will be a watershed event in the global democratic revolution' (speechwriters for President Bush often appeared consciously to echo Roosevelt's rhetoric, although notably FDR's 'peace-loving peoples' became Bush's 'freedom-loving peoples').

destroyed large parts of Mogadishu and over the following weeks some 340,000 people fled the capital. In fact, the anti-government fighters are dominated by the Hawiye clan, who fear what they see as an attempt by President Abdullahi Yusuf to advance the interests of his Darod clan. A further 80,000 people fled the latest fighting in November, causing leading UN officials to state that Mogadishu is facing a humanitarian catastrophe.

The fact that inter-clan violence in Somalia exhibits most of the characteristics of inter-ethnic or sectarian conflict in other countries means that it produces a very high score on nearly all the indicators used in the Peoples under Threat listing. In most cases, civilian victims are targeted simply because of their clan identity. However, also at

particular risk in Somalia are the country's ethnic minorities, the Bantu and caste groups such as the Midgan, Tumul and Yibir, who have been subjected to violence by all sides and whose social and economic marginalization makes them particularly vulnerable to the general effects of the conflict.

In Burma, demonstrations by Buddhist monks and the subsequent crackdown made the international headlines during 2007, but the continuing violent repression of minorities was barely reported. Both the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar have drawn attention to serious human rights violations targeting ethnic groups including the Karen, Rohingya and Shan. In October the BBC reported

Peoples most under threat – highest rated countries 2008

Rank	Country	Group	Total
1	Somalia	Darood, Hawiye, Issaq and other clans; Ogadenis; Bantu; Gabooye (Midgan) and other 'caste' groups	22.81
2	Iraq	Shia, Sunnis, Kurds, Turkomans, Christians, Mandeans, Yezidis, Faili Kurds, Shabak, Baha'is, Palestinians	22.56
3	Sudan	Fur, Zaghawa, Massalit and others in Darfur; Dinka, Nuer and others in the South; Nuba, Beja	21.56
4	Afghanistan	Hazara, Pashtun, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkomans, Baluchis	20.89
5	Burma/ Myanmar	Kachin, Karenni, Karen, Mons, Rakhine, Rohingya, Shan, Chin (Zomis), Wa	20.10
6	Dem. Rep. of the Congo	Hema and Lendu, Hunde, Hutu, Luba, Lunda, Tutsi/Banyamulenge, Twa/Mbuti	19.87
7	Pakistan	Ahmaddiya, Baluchis, Hindus, Mohhajirs, Pashtun, Sindhis, other religious minorities	19.16
8	Nigeria	Ibo, Ijaw, Ogoni, Yoruba, Hausa (Muslims) and Christians in the North	18.90
9	Ethiopia	Anuak, Afars, Oromo, Somalis, smaller minorities	17.77
10	Chad	'Black African' groups, Arabs, Southerners	17.62
11	Sri Lanka	Tamils, Muslims	16.63
12	Iran	Arabs, Azeris, Baha'is, Baluchis, Kurds, Turkomans	15.71
13	Central African Republic	Kaba (Sara), Mboum, Mbororo, Aka	15.59
14	Lebanon	Druze, Maronite Christians, Palestinians, Shia, Sunnis	15.29
15	Cote d'Ivoire	Northern Mande (Dioula), Senoufo, Bete, newly settled groups	15.26
16	Uganda	Acholi, Karamojong	15.25
17	Angola	Bakongo, Cabindans, Ovimbundu, pastoralists, San and Kwisi	15.25

continued

Rank	Country	Group	Total
18	Philippines	Indigenous peoples, Moros (Muslims), Chinese	15.14
19	Burundi	Hutu, Tutsi, Twa	14.83
20	Haiti	Political/social targets	14.67
21	Nepal	Madheshis (Terai), Dalits, linguistic minorities	14.48
22	Zimbabwe	Ndebele, Europeans, political/social targets	14.26

Unfortunately it is conflict, rather than democracy, that has spread within and beyond the borders of Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel/Palestine, Pakistan and Somalia. Many critics, particularly in the countries affected, have moved beyond a condemnation of the US intervention in Iraq to seeing the hand of the superpower behind each and every negative development. Indeed, it can be argued that the sectarian nature of the conflict in Iraq was clearly aggravated by specific US policy errors, including: the early decision to dismantle the central state and divide power in the Iraqi polity along strict ethnic and sectarian quotas; the handling of an electoral process which effectively excluded Sunni Arabs from political power during the crucial constitution-making year in 2005; and the largely uncritical support for a new Iraqi government whose members were directly implicated in gross sectarian human rights abuses, including systematic torture and mass extra-judicial executions.

There is, however, a danger of seeing everything in terms of superpower influence, if only because it implies that a war can be stopped in the same way as it was started. The US neo-conservative movement and its most ardent critics, while disagreeing violently about US intentions, sometimes appear to share an almost idealist conception of superpower agency, as if the US can direct events on the ground at will. Yet, in Iraq, the sectarian violence is obviously also driven by factors that even the wilder conspiracy theories would acknowledge are clearly beyond the control of the US, not least the legacy of inter-communal hatred left by Saddam Hussein and the sectarian chauvinism of groups such as al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia or the Jaish al-Mahdi.

Over the past 18 months, sectarian or ethnic conflict has permeated every corner of Iraq and haemorrhaged across its borders. The huge escalation in sectarian and ethnic killing, which has supplanted the war against insurgents as the principal cause of fatalities in Iraq, is usually dated from the bombing of the al-Askari shrine in February 2006 but really started to grip the country after the inauguration of the permanent Iraqi government that May. At its peak the conflict has been responsible for over 3,000 civilian deaths a month, the majority Sunni victims of Shi'a death squads and the victims of suicide bombings by Sunni militants, but including casualties of Multinational Force operations. From summer 2007 the number of fatalities decreased to around 1,000 a month, following the 'surge' of US forces, particularly in the capital Baghdad, and the suspension of the military activities of the Jaish al-Mahdi. There are a number of reasons, however, to fear that this decrease will not continue: first, the pattern of past heavy US troop deployments, for example in the northern city of Mosul, has shown that improved security is rarely sustained when US troop levels fall again; second, the Jaish al-Mahdi remains very strong and the self-imposed suspension in its operations for a maximum period of six months may only be a tactical step; and, third, although violence is down, the flight of internally displaced persons and refugees has left many of Iraq's communities completely divided on sectarian and ethnic lines. Finally, the US tactic of co-opting Sunni tribal leaders in the fight against al-Qaeda may not last once the large financial incentives are no longer offered, and in any case continues the disastrous policy of arming and strengthening sectarian actors in Iraq at the expense of the central state.

How is the Peoples under Threat table constructed?

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, but it was not until the 1990s that researchers such as Helen Fein, 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 existing 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 worked with the US State Failure Task Force to construct and test 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*, vol. 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 1955–97 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 (MRG) 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 inquiry, 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 either with 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. MRG 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, for example in Iraq, 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

An impending constitutional deadline for a referendum over the future status of Kirkuk has raised tension between communities in the city and in other disputed areas, and violence has increased. The most deadly suicide bombing attacks since the Iraq war began killed over 400 Yezidis in Sinjar in August, probably a calculated attempt to push the Kurdish-speaking Yezidis out of the area. It underscored just how dangerous the situation continues to be for minorities living in the disputed areas of Nineveh and Kirkuk adjoining Kurdistan. Major bomb attacks also hit the Kurdistan Regional Government and the use of Iraqi Kurdistan as a base by Turkish PKK rebels prompted serious invasion threats from Turkey. Iran, too, threatened further military action against Kurdish rebels based in Iraq.

In addition to the over 2 million people now believed internally displaced in Iraq, a further 2 million have fled the country, most of them for Syria or Jordan. Up to one-third of these are believed to come from Iraq's smaller minority communities, including Armenians, Chaldo-Assyrians, Faily Kurds, Mandaeans, Shabak, Turkomans and Yezidis.

Afghanistan, the other major theatre for US military operations, also continues to have a destabilizing influence on neighbouring countries. The use of bases across the border in Pakistan by al-Qaeda

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 Reference section in this volume (pp. 161–7). 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 at the beginning of 2008.

and Taliban fighters after 2001 made Pakistan a key ally of the US in the 'war on terror'. However, large-scale military operations by Pakistani forces in Waziristan and North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), including house demolitions and other violations against civilians, have had the effect of alienating the local Pashtun population. The Lal Masjid or Red Mosque in Islamabad, which had strong links to militants from Pakistan's tribal areas, was stormed by troops in July leading to the deaths of over 100. New military offensives were launched in North Waziristan in October and, after the declaration of a state of emergency, in NWFP in November. The year also saw continued repression of ethnic Baluchis, following the killing of a Baluchi leader in 2006.

In Afghanistan itself, NATO forces are still not able to guarantee security outside of the capital Kabul, particularly in the Pashtun south. In November, a bombing in Baghlan in northern Afghanistan killed six members of the Afghan parliament and some 80 others, Hazara, Tajiks and Uzbeks, raising fears of a new front opening up in the war. Growing instability in the north and the activities of criminal networks around heroin supply routes also threaten the security of Afghanistan's northern neighbours, including Uzbekistan, where repression targeted at religious groups continues amid rising tension over the future succession to President Karimov.

Sandwiched between the spreading conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan lies the country of Iran. International coverage of Iran has focused overwhelmingly on the question of Iran's nuclear facilities and on Iranian support for insurgent groups in Iraq, but the developing domestic tensions are poorly reported. In addition to the low-intensity conflict in Iranian Kurdistan, the last year has seen high-profile bombings in south-eastern Iran blamed on armed rebels from the Baluchi minority. Iranian officials accused US and UK forces in Afghanistan of supporting the rebels, just as they claimed that US and UK forces in Iraq had supported violent protests by Arabs in the Iranian province of Khuzistan. Perhaps most significant is the growing repression of Iran's Azerbaijanis or Azeris, who make up some 25 per cent of the population. Major demonstrations in May 2006, sparked by the depiction of an Azeri as a cockroach in a cartoon in a state-run newspaper, turned violent and led to widespread detentions and the deaths of tens of Azeris.

Iran is the highest-ranked country in the Peoples under Threat table where there is currently no major armed conflict. If such a conflict were to erupt – precipitated, for example, by US air strikes at Iranian nuclear facilities or state institutions, or an increase in US support for rebel groups – the threat level for mass killing would become among the highest in the world. The consequences for civilian life of any major conflict could be devastating, and the spread of conflict would be extremely hard to contain.

In March 1945, President Roosevelt told the US Senate that the recent Yalta conference of the Allied Powers:

'... ought to spell the end of a system of unilateral action, the exclusive alliances, the spheres of influence, the balances of power, and all the other expedients that have been tried for centuries – and have always failed. We propose to substitute for all these, a universal organization in which all peace-loving nations will finally have a chance to join.'

The creation of the United Nations Organization in the post-war settlement had as its principal aim the outlawing of war, and the UN must take some credit for the fact that international wars between states have been comparatively rare since its establishment. However, the ongoing march of internal or civil conflicts, and the overwhelming preponderance of

civilian rather than combatant casualties in today's wars, present a challenge to the UN system of conflict prevention that was not anticipated in 1945 and for which the UN continues to be ill-equipped today.

It is perhaps in the Darfur crisis that this has been demonstrated most tragically, both with regards to the prevention of conflict and its containment. In a report published last year, MRG showed how, from as early as 2000, the warning signs in Darfur were clear: the escalation of violence against minorities, the depopulation of villages. But the UN ignored those warnings, including from its own staff on the ground, and the post of Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Sudan was abolished in spring 2003, just as the violence sped out of control. Despite the UN World Summit in 2005 agreeing a 'responsibility to protect' populations against genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, the UN Security Council has repeatedly failed to authorize action sufficient to stop the Sudanese government continuing its campaign which to date has led to the deaths of at least 200,000 people and the displacement of over 2.4 million.

It is often remarked that the Darfur case illustrates the weaknesses of a multilateral approach when there is not sufficient consensus to apply genuine pressure on the state responsible for violating human rights. While this is undoubtedly so, it is once again dangerous to assume that it is only a question of political will. In most of the new generation of conflicts that extend from western Asia to Central Africa, the state not only fails to monopolize the means of violence, it also lacks the basic tools and skills to manage the claims of its diverse peoples. At a time when local conflicts over scarce resources are likely to intensify, those skills are more necessary than ever.

Resource conflicts and climate change

The phenomenon of 'resource conflicts' has been extensively described in the political science literature. A well-known study by Paul Collier for the World Bank, for example, suggests that a country that is otherwise typical but has primary commodity exports of around 25 per cent of GDP has a 33 per cent risk of conflict, but when exports are only 5 per cent of GDP the probability of conflict falls to 6 per cent. The correlation between armed conflict and a state's endowment with natural resources has also been linked by some commentators to the existence of a 'resource curse',

where resource-rich countries exhibit stunted development. This is particularly the case in Africa, where struggles over the exploitation of resources have further led to the development of conflict economies, from diamonds in Sierra Leone, oil in Sudan and Nigeria, to minerals, timber and gas in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The important role of natural resources in the creation and sustenance of conflict is not limited, however, to the case of resources for export. In each of the country situations listed above, and many other cases in every world region, the pivotal role of local resource conflicts over land, water and food security is increasingly being recognized.

In an article for the *Washington Post* in June, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon claimed:

'Amid the diverse social and political causes, the Darfur conflict began as an ecological crisis, arising at least in part from climate change.... It is no accident that the violence in Darfur erupted during the drought. Until then, Arab nomadic herders had lived amicably with settled farmers.... But once the rains stopped, farmers fenced their land for fear it would be ruined by the passing herds. For the first time in memory, there was no longer enough food and water for all. Fighting broke out. By 2003, it evolved into the full-fledged tragedy we witness today.'

This account has been criticized for simplifying a complex and long-standing pattern of local conflicts between pastoralists and agriculturalists, and for downplaying the massive repression unleashed by the Sudanese government. However, the scale of desertification in northern Darfur is widely recognized, as is its impact on pushing pastoralist communities to move south in search of pasture, increasing tensions with settled communities. One could posit a growing pattern throughout east Africa and the Horn where local conflicts over changing land use spread and intensify when ethnicity or tribal identities are used as a mobilizing factor by local politicians or governments.

This year's edition of the *State of the World's Minorities* focuses on the impact of climate change, which is likely to prove a challenge to human security not just through changing our environment but also through precipitating violent conflict. And while climate change will affect us all, it is a particular threat to minority and indigenous communities

because they frequently inhabit fragile environments, their land use is poorly protected, and they are vulnerable to displacement without reparation.

Preventing or containing the spread of violent conflict in many places around the world now depends on improving our understanding of the links between land use, food security and the protection of minorities and indigenous peoples. That this is also a matter of simple justice is reinforced by the new UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2007 after over 10 years of negotiations. Article 8 of the Declaration establishes that 'States shall provide effective mechanisms for prevention of, and redress for ... [a]ny action which has the aim or effect of dispossessing [indigenous people] of their lands, territories or resources ...'

In a number of reports produced this year, MRG published the results of a major three-year programme of research on minority rights and the prevention of conflict. Recommendations on promoting the economic and political participation of minorities, on constitutional and electoral systems that strengthen cooperation between communities, on self-governance and combating discrimination, all aim to ensure that minorities and indigenous peoples feel they have a stake in the societies in which they live and to provide governments with effective tools for the management of diversity. The application of some of these tools to many of the country situations identified in the Peoples under Threat table could help to weaken or remove key factors contributing to the outbreak of violent conflict, including emerging disputes over natural resources.

For many years the high incidence of ethnic and religious factors in the entrenchment and proliferation of the world's conflicts has been noted with regret by the international community but also with a sense of powerlessness. According to the protection of minorities and indigenous peoples a central place in conflict prevention initiatives is long overdue, to reduce the appalling toll of civilian casualties in today's wars but also to halt the spread of a new generation of conflicts that threatens to scar our globe for decades to come. ■