



P R E S S R E L E A S E

Political Conflicts in 2007

Heidelberg Institute: Decrease in wars, but number of sporadically violent conflicts still alarming

Heidelberg, December 17, 2007. In its "Conflict Barometer 2007", the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIK) has presented its current data and analyses concerning events in the field of conflicts throughout the world this year. Of the total number of 328 conflicts monitored, the political scientists class 130 as violent. Of these, 99 are classed as crises, i.e. disputes featuring a sporadic use of violence, and 31 as highly violent conflicts, meaning severe crises and wars. The remaining clashes of interest were conducted without the use of physical violence. Whereas the total number of conflicts has risen slightly compared to 2006, the number of crises has slightly decreased, and five highly violent conflicts fewer were counted. Therefore, the situation has become less tense compared to last year.

However, six wars continue to be waged. Five of these already constituted wars the previous year, and two, the wars in Iraq and in Sudan's Darfur region, are classed as wars the fourth year running. Further, more than half of the severe crises have been fought out on this level of violence since the previous year or even longer. This indicates an alarming hardening in many highly violent conflicts. Africa, Asia and Oceania, the Middle East and Maghreb are witnessing two wars each.

All in all, the region affected worst is the Middle East and Maghreb, with eight crises in addition to the two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This is even more alarming considering the very small number of countries in the Middle East and Maghreb compared to the other regions.

Nine highly violent conflicts were conducted in Africa and the same number in Asia and Oceania. The situation in Africa therefore, where last year 15 highly violent disputes occurred, has become considerably calmer. However, the two wars – in Somalia and in the Darfur region of Sudan – continue; the former from the year before, the latter for the fourth year running. The conflict in Darfur in particular is being conducted with a marked level of cruelty, not least against the civilian population. The number of wars in Asia and Oceania rose by one, as the ongoing war in Sri Lanka was joined by another in Pakistan, in the region bordering on Afghanistan. The Americas saw three highly violent conflicts but no wars. In Europe, for the first time in about 30 years, no highly violent conflict was observed, since the dispute in Chechnya, which has constituted a severe crisis over the last few years, de-escalated slightly, and no new highly violent conflict emerged.

The decreasing number of highly violent conflicts does not, however permit the conclusion that the world is actually becoming a more peaceful place. In the light of the very large number of crises, i.e. violent conflicts marked by small-scale clashes, raids or occasional bombings, in these past few years, the reduction in the number of highly violent disputes might also be interpreted as an indication of changes in the ways conflicts are conducted. Despite a slight decrease the number of crises remained at an alarmingly high level this year, too. Although they often receive little notice in politics or the media these conflicts can have grave consequences for the situation of the people as well as for the stability of

the states affected by them. What is more, these conflicts present a considerable potential for escalation.

Since its foundation in 1991, the HIIK has distinguished itself above all by not only monitoring violent but also non-violent conflicts. This ensures that national and international disputes are already included in long-term analysis before a potential escalation.

Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

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