

WAR



INDEX



2023

YEARBOOK



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INTRODUCTION



The NGO «USSD» continues its annual project on monitoring military activity worldwide. Presenting to you the «War Index-2023.» In 2023, the Russian-Ukrainian war emerged as the most significant global event, becoming one of the most extensive conflicts since the Korean War in terms of technical intensity and the largest European conflict since 1945.

The Palestinian-Israeli war, triggered by a terrorist attack from Hamas on Israel, evolved into a military operation in the Gaza Strip, posing a threat of becoming a global conflict between Israel and the Arab world.

Tensions are rising in the Pacific region, particularly concerning Taiwan in the lead-up to the island’s elections. North Korea’s demonstration of military threats and readiness for war adds to the anxiety.

In less developed states, prolonged conflicts persist, although many are decreasing in intensity through negotiation processes (such as in Ethiopia). Conflicts are spreading across other continents, with South

America witnessing Argentina demanding sovereignty over the Falkland Islands from Britain, and Venezuela considering the annexation of the disputed Guyana-Essequibo region, backed by a potential referendum.

Yemeni Houthi attacks on civilian ships in the Red Sea jeopardize global supply chain security, with 15% of the world’s trade passing through the Red Sea.

West Africa remains tense as Russia exacerbates instability and supports military coups. Power continues to be a decisive factor in resolving international disputes, as seen in Azerbaijan’s resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue.

A notable feature is the resurgence of conventional warfare means, with numerous armies engaged in frontal clashes. Simultaneously, the importance of technological advancement, particularly in data accuracy and speed, is evident.

The Russian-Ukrainian war is part of a global confrontation, the «quiet third world war,» unfolding since 2011 in various theaters of military action. It is a war without



a formal declaration, involving all components of the «fourth-generation warfare,» breaking out through open military conflicts.

Alongside the U.S.-China proxy confrontation, regional leaders such as Iran and Turkey actively engage in power competition.

The influence of networked militarized formations and the emergence of quasi-state instruments are strengthening. These quasi-states fill the gaps in «dead zones» beyond the influence of national states and regional leaders, resulting from strategic superpower rivalry. Private armies are fully engaged in these activities.

Direct military interventions, along with the widespread use of non-military pressure and coercion tools, reinforce the trend of using force to achieve political goals.

Classification OF MILITARY CONFLICTS

Experts from the Non-Governmental Analytical Center „Ukrainian Studies of Strategic Disquisitions“ propose a classification of military conflicts for analyzing global military activity:

War:

- Global wars (mostly involving multiple coalitions)
- Regional wars
- Local wars
- Interstate wars (including low-intensity phases)
- Wars between a state and a coalition
- Foreign intervention
- Civil wars (varying intensity, including external interference)

Border conflict

(limited armed incident).

Local conflict

Military coup

Terrorism

(or guerrilla action from a different perspective).

Internal political crisis

tension, political crisis (with the possibility of escalation and external intervention).

Diplomatic standoff

trade wars, diplomatic conflicts.



Military conflicts



THE METHODOLOGY FOR DETERMINING THE WAR INDEX INVOLVES EXAMINING ACTIVELY MANIFESTING CONFLICTS WORLDWIDE DURING THE RESEARCH PERIOD THROUGH A SERIES OF INDICATORS DELINEATING THE CONFLICT'S ESSENCE, PROGRESSION, AND SIGNIFICANCE FOR REGIONAL AND GLOBAL SECURITY, AND CLASSIFYING THEM BY TENSION LEVEL, FROM THE HOTTEST TO MINIMAL CONFRONTATIONS.

WAR

Ukraine

EVENTS, INCIDENTS

The high likelihood of a large-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine has been evident since 2014. However, during this time, the Ukrainian authorities failed to take sufficient measures to strengthen the country's defense capabilities.

The unpreparedness of Ukraine's defense to repel a full-scale invasion, coupled with the existence of a network of Russian agents within Ukraine, influenced Russia's military-political leadership in choosing its invasion plan.

The Russian leadership, trapped in colonial stereotypes, underestimated all three components of war (according to Clausewitz): state leadership, the army, and the people. In Moscow's vision, Ukrainian leadership was expected to flee or hide, the Armed Forces of Ukraine to disband or join the occupiers, and the people to either welcome the «liberators» with flowers or sit frightened in their homes.

The Kremlin's overestimation of its capabilities and underestimation of Ukrainian forces explain why the Russian invasion forces were smaller than recommended by military science, considering the size and population of the theater of war. The Russian invasion forces were insufficient for a full-scale war.

Despite significant failures in Kremlin's plans, its strategic goals remained unchanged: the destruction of Ukraine's statehood internationally (through a so-called neutral status), actual colonial dependence, further occupation of sovereign Ukrainian territories,

rejection of Ukrainian identity labeled as «Nazism,» undermining Ukraine's internal subjectivity, destruction of industrial potential, and infrastructure.

The outcome of the war in 2022 included successful Ukrainian offensives in the Kyiv region during the first months, followed by effective operations in the Kharkiv and Kherson regions. This allowed Ukraine to completely free the right bank of the Dnipro River, eliminate the Izyum offensive enclave, and thwart Russia's planned offensive to cut off Donbas, where a significant concentration of the Ukrainian army is located.

In the winter of 2022-2023, a Russian counteroffensive took place near Bakhmut, depleting Russia's resources. In 2023, Russia managed to capture after essentially erasing the towns of Bakhmut, Selydove, and Mariinka in the Donetsk region.

By the end of spring, Ukraine regained the initiative, launching counteroffensive actions in the south with simultaneous strikes in Donbas. Ukrainian defense forces cut off the large Velykonovosilkivsky bulge and established a resilient position in the Robitnytske area.

INTENSITY

The interstate conflict between Ukraine and Russia (utilizing the logistic capabilities of Belarus), involves global-level forces.

However, the Russian army, through covert mobilization, was able to replenish its forces, not only defending in the south but also attempting limited offensives in the Lyman and Kup'yansk directions. By winter 2023, Russia regained the initiative and initiated offensives along the entire front line.

The main challenges for the Armed Forces of Ukraine included a shortage of weapons and ammunition for offensive operations, lack of air parity, and lost time due to logistical delays in the supply of military aid by Western allies. This allowed Russia to fortify defensive lines and expand minefields. In such conditions, Ukrainian forces utilized precision strikes to destroy enemy infrastructure, artillery, and amassed forces, achieving significant successes over time, especially in limiting the supply of ammunition to enemy artillery.

Russia resorted to one of its two ultimate means (besides nuclear weapons) – initiating a so-called partial mobilization. However, this led to a significant increase in tension within Russia, manifested in protest movements (particularly notable in Dagestan). Mobilizing combat units did not yield significant results, such as freezing the front line.

In 2023, Russia continued to actively use its missile monopoly, striking across Ukraine, including civilian objects and critical infrastructure. Only the limited availability of air defense systems and ammunition provided by allies partially mitigated the damage caused to Ukraine by Russia's missile strikes. North Korean missile complexes were detected in use by the end of 2023.

Overall, in 2023, Russia deployed 1255 cruise missiles, 555 ballistic and aeroballistic missiles, and over 3201 kamikaze drones.

The claimed results by Ukraine include the restoration of state borders on August 24, 1991, inclusive of liberating the occupied territories of Crimea and Donbas over nine years. Russia's unspoken goal of the «special military operation» remains the complete elimination of Ukraine's statehood. Neither of these

tasks has been achieved in one and a half years, with both forces significantly exhausted by active front-line actions. Russia attempted a winter offensive in Donbas, involving a significant number of mobilized troops, but could only seize Bakhmut in May with substantial losses among the recruited Wagner PMC prisoners.

Ukraine took advantage of the concentration of enemy forces around Bakhmut to prepare fresh forces for a summer counteroffensive starting in June. However, over six months, the Russians also significantly strengthened their defensive line in the south, primarily due to the over-saturation of minefields. This resulted in slow counteroffensive actions by the Armed Forces of Ukraine with considerable losses of equipment.

By the end of the year, the intensity of actions in the south decreased, but the Armed Forces of Ukraine managed to establish positions on the left bank of Kherson, near Krynychna. Russia initiated another large-scale operation to capture Avdiivka following the Bakhmut scenario. Simultaneously, air strikes on Ukraine intensified, but thanks to improvements in Ukrainian air defense systems, Russia failed to repeat the energy crisis of late 2022. Simultaneously, significant results were achieved in destroying enemy infrastructure and artillery, including deep within Russia (attack on the Pskov airbase).

Ukraine successfully utilized asymmetrical methods to neutralize Russia's total advantage in the Black Sea, virtually preventing large-scale Russian amphibious operations and lifting the blockade from the ports of Odesa. Russia, under the threat of destruction, had to relocate most of its fleet from Crimea to Novorossiysk.



Impact on Global Processes

Against the backdrop of the collapse of the «grain deal» and Putin's demonstration of weakness during the so-called «Wagner rebellion,» Ukrainian diplomatic positions strengthened. This was evident in the negotiations in Jeddah – a positive step in forming a negotiation group with Kyiv and without Moscow, with China's participation.

However, in recent months, there has been an increase in contacts between China and the United States amid many serious publications in Germany and the United States about the inability of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (ZSU) to achieve quick results. This may indicate intensive negotiations on freezing the conflict.

From the very beginning of the full-scale Russian attack, Belarus has been used as a springboard for attacks on Ukrainian territories. Besides, there are constant attempts to involve Belarusian military

personnel in the war. The presence of Russian forces and the infiltration of Belarusian security structures by Russian special services increase the risks of direct annexation by Moscow.

Another instrument of Moscow's influence is attempts to increase pressure on Europe by creating problems in neighboring regions, primarily in Africa. In this context, the coup in Nigeria and the disruption of uranium supplies to France, threatening an energy crisis in Europe in the fall, are considered.

In 2023, Russia secured support in the supply of missiles, artillery ammunition, and unmanned aerial systems from Iranian and North Korean production.

Unfortunately, it has been revealed that Western allies of Ukraine are collectively unable to produce and supply as many artillery munitions as North Korea and lack the political will and determination to provide medium-range missile systems and unmanned aerial complexes.



Trends

In late spring 2023, Ukraine managed to regain the initiative on the front. The fall mobilization of Russia was depleted near Bakhmut. The main task of the Ukrainian army in the summer-fall campaign was to break through enemy lines in the Zaporizhzhia region, which was not fully achieved by the end of the year. This task was carried out with full enemy air and firepower superiority. To this disbalance, the long-range artillery of Russia adds. The role of drones and guided munitions is increasingly growing.

The issue of dealing with personnel, feeling fatigued from intense year-and-a-half-long battles, is also becoming increasingly problematic. On the other hand, civilians had excessively high expectations of a quick victory, leading to gradual disillusionment fueled by enemy misinformation. This exacerbates mobilization problems necessary for troop replenishment and rotation.

Economic Trends

After almost two years of full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war, we can talk about economic stabilization on both sides. The Ukrainian economy, after experiencing a rapid decline of over 29% in 2022, rebounded from the bottom and is slowly growing. Similarly, Russia is gradually recovering from sanctions, redirecting towards new markets. Despite sanctions, Russia has substantially shifted its economy towards war, launching the military-industrial complex at full capacity for three shifts. The budget expenditures on war in 2023, compared to 2021, increased by 60%. The employment structure in Russia is actively changing towards military specialties.

The Ukrainian economy is performing significantly better than expected twelve months ago. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the end

of 2023 is expected to grow by about 5%, and inflation in November slowed down to 5.1% on an annual basis. If positive trends persist, the economy may grow by 4-6% in 2024, according to the International Monetary Fund. The main factors positively influencing the Ukrainian economy are battlefield successes, business adaptability, uninterrupted electricity supply, high crop yields in the agricultural sector, and stability of the exchange rate. Thanks to a high level of reserves, the National Bank manages to keep the hryvnia exchange rate within the predicted range. The main threat for 2024 is a possible reduction in external financing.

Russia's Problems

Russia has lost a significant amount of military equipment, which may limit its capability for large-scale ground offensives. This could be one of the reasons why the Russian government and President Putin increasingly view this war as a long-term measure necessary for ensuring Russia's security.

Russia managed to partially mobilize its military-industrial complex to meet the regular needs of the army, albeit with minimal reserves and apparent unreadiness for a conflict with a state possessing a more serious air complex. Of course, all of this was achieved with great difficulty – strikes on the energy infrastructure would not have had such consequences without the extensive use of Iranian Shahids, who are now beginning to manufacture drones themselves (though Ukraine is also building drones).

The continuation of a protracted struggle, slowly depleting Ukrainian weapon reserves while simultaneously leading to a reduction in Western aid, is a key part of Russia's current strategy in the war against Ukraine.



Casualties

Simultaneously, transforming this war into a slow, exhausting campaign provides time for the sub-sanctioned defense industry to find necessary solutions and employ alternative pathways. For example, there have been notable successes in the enemy's production of drones, including the «Lancet» type. This is not only due to assistance from Iran and China but also the continuation of semi-legal supplies from Europe. The purchase of foreign-made microchips is crucial for the production of Russian military systems, weapons, and technologies. Official sources confirm that the X-101 missiles used by the Russians in August against Ukraine were manufactured in April 2023 and contained approximately 30 foreign microchips.

According to the General Staff of Ukraine, the combat losses of Russian forces are approximately 359,000 individuals, while Russia claims around 8,000 casualties. Ukrainian data reports damage to more than 35,000 units of Russian military equipment, with over 8,500 confirmed by photo and video evidence, three times more than confirmed Ukrainian losses (around 2,600 units of equipment). The missile cruiser «Moskva,» the flagship of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, the landing ship «Novocherkassk,» and other vessels have been sunk. Ukrainian military losses, according to rough estimates, exceed 25,000 individuals.





Negotiations Between Parties

Negotiations are on pause, as the Ukrainian side refuses to accept capitulation demands, while the Kremlin expects Ukraine and its Western allies to become exhausted. However,

increasingly, the Russian side demonstrates a willingness to negotiate to secure specific gains, minimize losses, and buy time to build up forces. The risk of increased pressure on Kyiv,

with the conflict transitioning to a low-intensity phase on the part of allies seeking problem-freezing, is growing.

Humanitarian Consequences

Civilian losses, according to UN data as of December, include 10,065 fatalities (including 429 children) and 18,679 wounded. Many victims, especially in temporarily occupied territories, remain unaccounted for, and actual figures could be several times higher, potentially reaching up to 20,000 missing persons.

The situation in the southern occupied territories, where ethnic cleansing is ongoing, and a harsh occupation regime is established, is extremely challenging. Increasing global attention is given to the «nuclear terrorism of Russia» – the occupation of one of the largest nuclear power stations in Europe, the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. Documented cases of genocide involve horrendous crimes committed by the aggressor against civilians, including killings and torture in liberated cities and villages, such as Bucha, Hostomel, Makariv, and Borodyanka in the Kyiv region, and in Izyum in Kharkiv region. Occupiers also systematically

take Ukrainian children, transporting them to Russia (up to 20,000 minors identified). This has led to the opening of a case against Putin and other relevant Russian officials at the International Criminal Court in The Hague.

In June, due to the threat of a Ukrainian military crossing of the Dnipro, Russia committed another act of genocide and ecocide by blowing up the dam of the Zaporizhzhia Hydroelectric Power Station, flooding vast areas near the Dnipro. The number of casualties in the occupied left-bank Dnipro region, where occupiers hindered rescue efforts, is still unknown.

According to UN data, as of now, around 26 million individuals crossed the border, mainly towards neighboring EU states. Of them, approximately 6.2 million people did not return and remain abroad. Additionally, about 4.8 million people became internally displaced within the country, according to government data (other estimates suggest the number could be twice as high).



Forecast

As both sides lack resources and means, a crucial element in the long war is maintaining diplomatic and military-political support:

- For Ukraine: the United States, NATO, the United Kingdom, Poland, and the Baltic countries.
- For Russia: the formation of a conditional anti-American coalition because Russia can no longer produce enough necessary technology, especially drones and precision missile weapons.

Amidst the prolongation of the conflict, Russia is preparing for a massive wave of mobilization. According to Western estimates, training grounds can accommodate up to 600,000 recruits. However, massive and rapid offensive actions are currently minimally possible for Russia. Ukrainian actions depend significantly on the dynamics of partner deliveries, particularly aviation. The dominant scenario for 2024 remains a positional war reminiscent of World War I.

The formation of a «strategic balance» on the front and Russia's use of the tactic of meaty assaults, leading to the depletion of the

live forces of both sides, forces both parties, especially Ukraine, to seek new tactical solutions to preserve live forces on the front lines. In areas where the front has become static, the sensible approach involves saturation and use of robotic and automated fire control systems, reconnaissance, and attacking unmanned aerial systems, capable of disrupting enemy assaults, conducting reconnaissance, and destroying enemy positions on the front lines without unnecessary risk to live forces.

Russia has lost a significant amount of military equipment, which may limit its capability for large-scale ground offensives. This may be one of the reasons why the Russian government and President Putin increasingly view this war as a long-term measure necessary for ensuring Russia's security.

The Russian government experienced a major legitimacy crisis during the Wagner PMC uprising, adding to the weariness of the population from the war. However, there are no prerequisites for quick revolutionary changes yet.

Resistance of subjugated peoples and Russians themselves against mobilization and loss of life will increase, but significant shifts in the political landscape of individual regions are not expected in the short term. However, dissatisfaction with the regime gradually intensifies with the aggravation of various problems and manifests in spontaneous, yet non-politicized movements. A notable example is the unrest in the Caucasus, especially in Dagestan, in October 2023, in the context of support for the Muslim sector of Gaza.

Negative trends in Ukraine are growing, fueled by corruption scandals and disillusionment with the seemingly ineffective counteroffensive. Moscow will continue to exploit these factors.

The main directions of Russia's information-psychological operations aimed at weakening Ukrainian society will include:

- Dissemination of opinions and narratives in Ukraine and globally that Ukraine is incapable of winning.
- Provocation of disappointment and distrust among the population towards the Ukrainian government amid worsening socio-economic conditions.
- Provocation of political conflicts and, through them, the

discredit of the Ukrainian political class.

Therefore, critical for Ukraine's victory is not only achieving success on the front and obtaining positive and noticeable results but also shifting the war to the territory of the adversary, primarily in the ideological-informational sphere. It is essential to use the exacerbation of socio-economic disparities between regions in Russia, and national contradictions, and support the national self-determination of non-Russian

peoples.

The main challenge for Ukraine remains technical dependence on the supply of allies, not only high-tech (a domestic artillery ammunition plant must be built by next year).

On the other hand, successful technological solutions have been found in naval warfare, strengthening the possibility of significantly restricting Black Sea trade for Russia (primarily grain and petroleum products, as well as dual-use sub-sanctioned products).

American support for Kyiv will be significantly influenced by discussions in Washington in the context of presidential elections. Europe will be forced to engage more actively in supporting Ukraine, particularly through the active production of tank equipment in Ukraine with the participation of the German corporation «Rheinmetall.»



War Israel - Palestine



EVENTS, INCIDENTS

On October 7, 2023, with the support of other terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip, particularly the «Palestinian Islamic Jihad,» HAMAS carried out a brutal attack on the south of Israel, targeting kibbutzim and settlements near Gaza. The attack occurred simultaneously from land, air (hang gliders), and sea (boats, homemade submarines).

In the first days, over 1300 civilians, soldiers, and foreigners were killed - the highest number of Jewish deaths in a single day since the Holocaust. More than 200 people were taken hostage, with 136 still remaining in Gaza. Israel declared a state of war for the first time since 1973 and utilized the Basic Law to declare war on HAMAS. The operation was named «Iron Swords.»

A significant part of the blame lies with the intelligence, which «missed» the attack despite receiving alarming messages from within and outside. HAMAS terrorists trained openly in

replicas of Israeli kibbutzim and settlements for a year under the guidance of foreign instructors from Iran and Russia (former members of the Wagner PMC). The attack was meticulously planned, starting on the Sabbath and during a holiday, with a massive missile attack of a thousand rockets, followed by ground special forces advancing on land.

They disabled cameras, destroyed fences, and captured military bases. Ordinary Palestinians followed them using all possible means of transportation - pickups, motorcycles, tractors, bicycles, and on foot. In captured settlements, HAMAS committed incredibly bloody terror, killing, torturing, kidnapping, and raping anyone in their path.

Israel could not mobilize immediately, reminiscent of the events of 1973 and the Yom Kippur War. There were situations where soldiers were traveling to the combat zone on their own, picking up colleagues along the way. Generals and colonels,

without waiting for orders, also went, forming units right there.

Eventually, Israel initiated a powerful bombardment of the Gaza Strip, resulting in the deaths and injuries of thousands of Palestinians. Then the IDF forces entered the Gaza Strip - the first time since 2005 - beginning the phase of destroying HAMAS and conquering Gaza. As of now, combat operations inside the Strip are ongoing - the IDF is killing terrorists, and destroying weapon depots, and tunnel infrastructure.

This is one of the largest urban battles in recent times, resembling events in cities like Raqqa, Mosul, and Fallujah in Iraq.

Trends

Currently, there is a threat of the conflict spreading at least to Lebanon or the southern part of Lebanon due to hostilities between Israel, Hezbollah, and Palestinian factions in that region. In this case, limited or full-scale intervention by Iran and Syria is possible.

Casualties

It is difficult to estimate the number of casualties in Gaza because the figures are provided by the Health Ministry controlled by HAMAS. There is no trust in them. But, as mentioned above, it is thousands of people, probably tens of thousands. Over 1000 militants were killed inside Israel. On the Israeli side, 509 soldiers and 59 officers were killed, with 175 killed in Gaza.

Impact on Global Processes

The conflict has already spilled beyond Israel. Connected hostilities continue in southern Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria, from the Houthi side in Yemen, in the waters of the Red and Arabian Seas. The war against HAMAS has caused unprecedented global anti-Semitism and powerful actions in support of Palestine. The situation was particularly

difficult on college and university campuses, where there were threats and physical fights. Arab monarchies, while publicly condemning Israel's actions, privately support it. Globally, the Israel-Palestine conflict diverted attention from the war in Ukraine, forcing the U.S. to supply weapons there as well.

Humanitarian Consequences

In the Gaza Strip, due to the conflict, HAMAS tyranny, and shelling, an extremely dire humanitarian situation has emerged. There is a shortage of food, water, and medicine. There are no safe places inside Gaza. Two million people live on a small area of 42 by 12 km. Most of them have been forced to move to the southern capital - Khan Yunis - and the Rafah crossing, as the IDF completes operations in the north of Gaza City and moves further. HAMAS also uses civilian objects - mosques, schools, kindergartens, residential buildings, parking lots, and beaches - as dual-use facilities, dooming them to destruction (often with civilians inside as human shields). Additionally, many homemade HAMAS rockets fell inside Gaza, causing additional destruction.

Forecast

The battle in Gaza will continue for at least a few more months and is most likely to end with full occupation and demilitarization of the Strip. But what comes next is unknown. The Netanyahu government rejects all attempts at international mediation, including the introduction of international forces into Gaza. Moreover, voices are growing to completely evict Arabs from Gaza. But where - that's also a mystery, as no Arab country has agreed to take them. Eventually, there will be peace talks, but Jerusalem does not want and does not plan to negotiate with Ramallah. So, how this war will end is currently an open question.

INTENSITY

The war is in a phase of medium intensity.

War Yemen

Casualties

Since the beginning of the war, over 150,000 people have died due to hostilities, including approximately 9,000 civilians. 50,000 have been injured, and up to 4 million have become refugees. The total death toll surpasses 377,000 individuals.

During the monitoring period, several hundred soldiers from both sides died in the Battle for Marib and during clashes between the Southern Movement and the Yemeni government. 85 civilians died due to panic in Sanaa.

EVENTS, INCIDENTS

The war in Yemen has been ongoing since 2015, characterized by conflict between the northern part of the country, where the Houthi group of Shiite faith resides, supporting former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, and the southern part (Sunnis supporting the government of Abd Rabbu Mansur Hadi). The Houthis are supported by Iran and to a lesser extent, Russia, while the south is backed by Saudi Arabia and its Arab allies, conducting armed intervention in the country.

Simultaneously, terrorists such as «Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula» and the «Islamic State» have been active on the desert outskirts.

Throughout the monitoring period, military actions continued alongside attempts at peaceful resolution.

The Battle for Marib has lasted for almost three years, starting in February 2021. The city is held by Yemeni government forces, while the Houthis control the surrounding territories. In 2023, the intensity of the fighting decreased, with both sides exchanging missile and drone strikes.

In early 2023, negotiations between Saudi Arabia and Iran intensified to resolve the conflict in Yemen. In March, Iranians agreed to halt arms supplies to the Houthis as part of an agreement with the Saudis, mediated by China.

In March, 85 people died and 322 were injured due to panic in a crowd in Houthi-controlled Sanaa.

On September 14, a Houthi delegation visited Riyadh, indicating significant progress towards peace talks.

In mid-December, a series of attacks on commercial ships occurred in the Red Sea, claimed by the Houthis. They declared that they would not allow cargoes heading to Israel, with whom the Houthis declared war since the beginning of hostilities on October 7. In response, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced the start of an international operation in the Red Sea to protect shipping.

On January 12, 2024, the armed forces of the United States and the United Kingdom launched strikes from destroyers and Tomahawk missiles on numerous Houthi-controlled targets in Yemen. The strikes targeted, among other locations, the port city of Hodeidah and the Yemeni capital, Sanaa. The objectives included Houthi training bases and weapon depots, particularly those storing kamikaze drones.

Trends

Throughout 2023, it seemed that the parties were increasingly leaning towards a peaceful resolution. However, Houthi actions in the Red Sea led to a significant escalation with unpredictable consequences.

INTENSITY

Civil war with foreign interventions (effectively a coalition standoff).

Negotiations Between Parties

In 2023, negotiations between Saudi Arabia and Iran intensified for a peaceful resolution of the Yemen conflict. This is happening with active mediation from China, aiming to implement various infrastructure projects in the region. In March, the Iranians agreed to halt arms supplies to the Houthis, joining the UN embargo through China's mediation.

Also, in March, the Houthis agreed to release 887 detainees after talks with the UN in Switzerland. Afterward, the UN Special Envoy Hans Grundberg stated that the conflict resolution process is finally moving in the right direction. On September 14, the Houthis visited Riyadh for another round of peace talks. Currently, negotiations are taking place with the mediation of Oman and are supposedly in the final stages.

Humanitarian Consequences

The humanitarian crisis resulted in a massive famine and a cholera epidemic, causing over 80,000 deaths from 2016 to 2018. For now, the threat has been mitigated with humanitarian aid, but the risk remains significant.

During the war, over 227,000 people died from hunger and lack of medicine, including over 85,000 children. Over 19,000 died due to bombings.

Impact on Global Processes

The region is located at the crossroads of transit routes from China to the Suez Canal and Europe. External players actively interfere in the conflict, which has been ongoing for over eight years. It reveals a regional confrontation between Iran and the states of the Arabian Peninsula (Saudi Arabia, UAE).

Starting from April 2022, the Houthis and the Yemeni government, through UN mediation, have agreed to ceasefires several times, successfully reducing the intensity of hostilities and decreasing the terrorist threat in the region. However, the threat intensified again at the end of the year after attacks on cargo ships in the Red Sea.

The negotiating process in 2023 indicates the normalization of diplomatic relations between Arab states and Iran with active participation from China.

The pirate activities of the Houthis in the Red Sea jeopardized 15% of global trade. This had a substantial impact on the positions of the United States, the United Kingdom, and EU countries regarding peaceful resolution in the region.

Forecast

In 2024, the Houthis and the official government of Yemen were supposed to conclude a peace agreement, considering the interest of the states supporting them. However, the peace process is now under threat due to Houthi attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea and the armed response from the United States and the United Kingdom.

War Syria



EVENTS, INCIDENTS

The war in Syria has been ongoing since 2011. The main conflict is between President Bashar al-Assad, who relies on ethno-confessional minorities such as Shiites and Alawites, and the opposition of the Sunni majority. Over time, the country has become a focal point of global power struggles. Assad is supported by Iran and Russia, while the opposition is backed by Arab states (primarily Qatar and Saudi Arabia) and the United States. In the northern part of the country, separate areas have formed under the control of Kurds and Turkmen, increasing Turkey's influence.

For Russia, full-scale intervention since 2015 has provided an opportunity to disrupt the West's plans in the Middle East, strengthen and consolidate anti-Euro-Atlantic forces, influence European policies, and regulate refugee flows.

During the monitoring period, following Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7 and subsequent Israeli responses, including airstrikes and ground attacks, there has been an increase in attacks on U.S. forces stationed in Syria and Iraq. Specifically, 58 attacks were carried out against U.S. military personnel in Syria.

In October, pro-Iranian forces launched strikes on U.S. military bases in Syria. The attacks were conducted using missiles and drones. The responsibility was claimed by the coalition «Islamic Resistance of Iraq,» uniting pro-Iranian Shiite groups operating in Iraq and Syria.

Against the backdrop of escalating violence, the U.S. deployed two naval strike groups led by the aircraft carriers USS Gerald R. Ford and USS Dwight D. Eisenhower to the region.

In November, the U.S. deliberately targeted a weapons storage facility in eastern Syria associated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

The U.S. conducted strikes on a training center and facilities used by IRGC representatives near the cities of Abu Kamal and Mayadin in eastern Syria.

Also in the fall, armed conflict erupted between Arabs and Kurds in northeastern Syria, both of which are part of the pro-American coalition. This involves Kurdish units of the People's Protection Units and Arab units of the Military Council of Deir ez-Zor. Both structures are part of the pro-American coalition «Syrian Democratic Forces,» which fought against ISIS and now, under the auspices of the United States, restrain Turkey, Iran, and Russia.

Simultaneously, Israel conducted dozens of strikes on Syrian territory, targeting objects associated with pro-Iranian forces. Russia continued to carry out a series of airstrikes in the Idlib province, not under government control, resulting in numerous civilian casualties.

In southern Syria, waves of protests by the local population took place. People protested against deteriorating living conditions and a lack of access to basic services due to sanctions and Damascus's ineffective economic policies. Protests led to clashes with security forces.

Casualties

Since 2011, over 400,000 people have died, and millions have become refugees. In 2023 alone, over 2,500 military personnel and approximately 1,800 civilians lost their lives.

Trends

While military clashes are localized, Assad, despite controlling 90% of the territory, continues to resist opposition groups, relying predominantly on Russia and Iran for support.

Negotiations Between Parties

Ceasefires are regularly interrupted by local military actions. Negotiations have yet to yield results.

Impact on Global Processes

Five countries have military forces in Syria: Russia, Turkey, Iran, Israel, and the United States. The armed forces of the United States and Russia operate directly in northern Syria. Turkey also supports forces in northern Syria, sometimes shelling Kurdish forces, which the Turkish government considers terrorists. Meanwhile, Israel conducts regular airstrikes in Syria against targets related to the Assad regime, Iran, and Hezbollah, which the Israeli government considers a threat to its security. Regional countries have their own goals in Syria, either in the form of military operations or attempts to normalize diplomatic relations with the Assad regime.

In September, for the first time since 2004, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad made an official visit to China, where both countries declared a strategic partnership.

INTENSITY

Civil war with foreign interventions.

Humanitarian Consequences

Against the backdrop of intensified hostilities in the country over the past few months, the humanitarian situation is deteriorating. The escalation of hostilities after the attack on the Syrian Military Academy in Homs on October 5 resulted in over 70 civilian casualties, including at least 23 children, 14 women, and four humanitarian workers, and displaced over 120,000 people. This marks the most significant escalation of violence in northwestern Syria since 2019.

As of 2023, approximately 15.3 million Syrians—over 69% of the population—require humanitarian assistance. Social and economic conditions for the population continue to worsen.

On November 13, the Syrian government announced its decision to extend permission to use the Bab al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings on the Syrian-Turkish border, used by UN humanitarian organizations and its partners for cross-border movements. Humanitarian operations also continued through the Bab al-Hawa border crossing on the Syrian-Turkish border, which was sanctioned by the Syrian government after Russia vetoed a Security Council resolution on July 11. The vetoed resolution would have expanded Syria's cross-border mechanism, allowing the delivery of humanitarian aid to government-uncontrolled parts of Syria without the Syrian government's consent.

Forecast

A major war is unlikely, but Turkey has the capability to restrain Russian forces and reduce Assad's sphere of influence. Turkey's increased influence in northern Syria will balance Assad's dominant position in the center and south of the country. At the same time, Israel restrains Assad, seeking to protect control over the occupied Golan Heights. However, the situation may be exacerbated by a general escalation between Israel and Palestine.

War

K a r a b a k h

EVENTS, INCIDENTS

During September 19-20, 2023, Azerbaijan conducted a military operation, fully restoring its territorial integrity, and the so-called Nagorno-Karabakh Republic de facto ceased to exist.

 Casualties

192 Azerbaijani military personnel killed, 511 injured.

Over 200 military personnel of the so-called NKR were killed, and over 400 were injured.

5 killed Russian «peacekeepers.»

28 civilians were killed (27 Armenians and 1 Azerbaijani), and over 200 were injured (over 200 Armenians and 1 Azerbaijani).

Over 100,000 refugees from Karabakh.

 Trends

For Azerbaijan, two crucial issues are obtaining a stable corridor to the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic and conducting demarcation and delimitation of borders with Armenia. The latter process aims to establish a new status quo between the two states. However, the problem lies in Azerbaijan's occupation of several areas of Armenian territory in September 2022. This, along with the unresolved issue of mutually occupied enclaves, complicates the negotiation of a comprehensive peace agreement between the

parties. Armenia is gradually trying to distance itself from Russia, seeking new allies and arms suppliers. Considering the losses during the Second Karabakh War in 2020 and the overall defeat of the Armenian Armed Forces, Yerevan critically needs to rearm its military. However, this is complicated by economic dependence on Russia (e.g., gas consumption) and maintaining its military presence (the base in Gyumri). In the region, Yerevan has limited room for geopolitical maneuvers.

Baku and Yerevan will engage in negotiations with clear advantages in favor of the former. Escalation scenarios should not be ruled out depending on the progress of talks on demarcation and delimitation of borders. Meanwhile, Russia will bet on a change of power in Armenia and preserving the country as its satellite. Simultaneously, Moscow will continue to receive dividends from friendly relations with Azerbaijan. It is quite possible that the so-called peacekeeping contingent may be used for further military actions against Ukraine. Tehran will also seek to maximize benefits from cooperation with Yerevan and the normalization of relations with Baku. In contrast, Ankara will continue its expansion through Azerbaijan into the countries of Central Asia.

 Forecast

INTENSITY

Two-day large-scale conflict in a long-standing interstate war.

Negotiations Between Parties

On September 20, 2023, Anar Eyvazov, the spokesperson for Azerbaijan's Ministry of Defense, called on the armed forces of the so-called NKR to cease resistance. The quasi-republic agreed to the proposal of the so-called Russian peacekeeping contingent in Nagorno-Karabakh to disarm. On September 21, negotiations were held in Yevlakh between the Azerbaijani authorities and representatives of the «parliament» of the so-called NKR regarding guarantees of security for ethnic Armenians and the region's reintegration. Yerevan officially distanced itself from these events. There was also a meeting between the «president» of the NKR, Samvel Shahramanyan, and the head of the State Security Service of Azerbaijan, Ali Nagiyev, in Shusha. On September 25, 2023, the second round of negotiations took place in Khodzjali. On September 28, Samvel Shahramanyan signed a decree according to which all «state institutions» would cease to exist on January 1, 2024. On September 29, the third round of negotiations took place in Yevlakh. On October 1, a UN delegation, led by the Permanent Coordinator in Azerbaijan, Vladanka Andreeva, arrived in Nagorno-Karabakh. On October 2, during the negotiations in Hankendi, the Azerbaijani side outlined its vision for the reintegration of the region. On November 28, 2023, the speaker of the Armenian parliament, Alen Simonyan, announced that the conflict in Karabakh was over. On December 13, Azerbaijan and Armenia exchanged prisoners.



Impact on Global Processes

Azerbaijan's full restoration of sovereignty over its entire territory marked another stage in changing the balance of power in the South Caucasus. Russia lost leverage over Azerbaijan in the form of a permanent zone of instability and suffered symbolic losses with its «peacekeepers» unable to fulfill the commitments outlined in the 2020 Trilateral Statement. Currently, the Russian contingent in Karabakh has significantly reduced its activities but continues to be present in the region. Moscow's position on «tolerating» Baku's actions is dictated by the desire to inspire protests in Armenia with the subsequent overthrow of Nikol Pashinyan's government. Nevertheless, despite this, Russia and Azerbaijan continue to maintain friendly relations. On September 21, 2023, Vladimir Putin and Ilham Aliyev held a phone conversation, and on October 12, 2023, before the summit of the heads of CIS states, they met in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Both presidents regularly communicate with each other. After the events on September 19-20, Armenia took a course towards gradually reducing cooperation with

Russia, particularly in the arms industry. Currently, Yerevan is reorienting itself to the Indian market – evidenced by contracts for the supply of Akash air defense systems, Pinaka MLRS, towed howitzers ATAGS, and more. It is essential to note that this weaponry reaches Armenia through Iran's territory. On October 3, 2023, the Armenian parliament ratified the Rome Statute and recognized the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, which issued an arrest warrant for Vladimir Putin. Armenia, for the first time since 2009, did not participate in the CSTO summit held on November 23, 2023. Iran's policy towards Azerbaijan became more flexible after the events of September 19-20, 2023. On October 6, the parties laid out a transit route that would connect Azerbaijan with the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. On October 23, 2023, Tehran hosted the foreign ministers of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Russia. Currently, Iran and Azerbaijan are expanding cross-border cooperation. The European Union and the United States, as in previous years, have limited influence in the region and are currently working on strengthening their positions in Armenia.

Sudan

War

EVENTS, INCIDENTS



On October 25, 2022, Sudan experienced a state coup, resulting in the removal of civilian representatives from power, consolidating all political functions in the hands of the military wing. The main figure behind the coup was General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, who played a key role in ousting dictator Omar al-Bashir in 2019.

The cause of the coup was the tensions between the military and civilian representatives of the Sovereign Council and the Sudanese government. In particular, according to the power transition agreement of 2019, on November 17, 2021, power was supposed to be fully concentrated in the hands of the civilian wing. However, there were issues that the military wanted to retain influence on the investigation of human rights violations during the Darfur crisis, revenue from the extractive industry, the existing order in the security sector, and the army.

Since the coup, continuous demonstrations and protests demanding the return of civilian governance have taken place in the country. The authorities respond to protests with repression, activist arrests, and the dispersal of rallies.

Description of the Monitoring Period

On April 15, clashes for control over the country began in Sudan between the regular Sudanese army (loyal to General al-Burhan) and the paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by the second most powerful figure in the country, General Mohamed Hamdan Daglo (known as Hemeti). Tensions between the two generals grew due to an agreement intended to facilitate the power transition and civilian administration of the country. The main

points of contention included the incorporation timeline of paramilitary groups into the regular Sudanese army, control over economic sectors, and the hierarchy within the military forces.

Initially, the fighting was concentrated mainly in the capital city of Khartoum and the Darfur state. From April to July, the main battle was for the capital. The army conducted airstrikes to displace the RSF, but there was no significant advantage for either side.

In June, the RSF captured some objects in Khartoum, and battles also took place in the regions of Kutum, Tavila, and Geneina. Armed militias in Darfur were accused of killing civilians. The situation was further complicated by the periodic involvement of other armed groups in the fighting: Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North, Third Front (Tamazuj) sided with RSF, and certain factions of the Sudan Liberation Movement in Al-Fashir, Justice and Equality Movement, Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (Minnawi) sided with the Sudanese Army.

In August, the theater of operations expanded to North Kordofan. On August 4, the RSF claimed full control over Central Darfur.

RSF gained a noticeable advantage from October: the paramilitary group captured almost the entire Darfur region (key cities - Geneina, Umm Keddada, Ed Daein, and Nyala - a city with a strategic connection, allowing RSF to receive arms and ammunition from outside).

Combat intensified in Western Kordofan as well. In the battle for Khartoum, RSF also made progress, capturing the town of Al-Ailafoon to the southeast of the capital. By the end of October, RSF controlled most of Khartoum but could not capture key military bases. RSF also seized the Jebel Aulia Dam in the Jabal Aulia village, providing the opportunity to later capture the state capital of Gezira, the city of Wad Madani, and its surroundings, as well as take control of the city of Rufaa in the east of the state and enter the Butana region.

After losing Wad Madani, voices calling for the resignation of General al-Burhan echoed in Sudan. By the end of the year, it can be stated that the advantage is on the side of RSF.

Negotiations

Between Parties

On May 6, delegates from the two warring parties met directly in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, for the first time. On May 20, an agreement was signed, ensuring the protection of civilians, but the deal did not include a ceasefire. Numerous ceasefires and previous agreements in this aspect were unsuccessful. At the end of October, the parties met again for talks in Jeddah, agreeing to open channels for humanitarian aid. However, the agreements were not adhered to, and on December 3, negotiations were postponed indefinitely.

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) held a peace summit in early December. The main achievement was that Generals Hemeti and al-Burhan agreed to meet in person at some point in the future.

Casualties

According to the Sudanese Ministry of Health and the UN, as of October, over 9,000 people have been killed, and another 12,000 have been injured.

Humanitarian Consequences

As of October 24, 2023, over 4.8 million people have been internally displaced, and more than 1.3 million have fled the country as refugees.

Impact on Global Processes

Sudan is situated in the strategic region of the Red Sea, one of the most important waterways in the world. For this reason, the country attracts special attention from the United States, Russia, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and the EU. The conflict has a destabilizing impact on the East African region, which is already unstable.

In addition, RSF has certain military and economic ties with the Wagner Group. Hemeti was in Russia before the invasion of Ukraine and generally supports the idea of building a Russian base in Sudan, which is a strategic goal for Russia.

Forecast

INTENSITY

Civil war.

Despite attempts at peaceful mediation, the conflict will persist, with a broader involvement of external players. A convincing victory for either side is unlikely. Possible destabilization on the borders with the Central African Republic, Eritrea, and Ethiopia.

War



EVENTS, INCIDENTS

The civil war in South Sudan has been ongoing since December 2013. The armed phase began with an unsuccessful coup attempt on December 16, 2013, carried out by military forces affiliated with former Vice President Riek Machar.

Parallel to the escalation of the armed conflict, peace initiatives were underway. Several rounds of negotiations took place, but signed peace protocols were violated within days. The conflict is complicated by the different ethnic backgrounds of the leaders of the warring factions: President Salva Kiir belongs to the Nuer ethnic group, while Riek Machar is Dinka.

The main peace agreement was signed on September 12, 2018. The document stipulated that Riek Machar would become one of the five vice presidents of South Sudan, a transitional government would be formed, a new parliament would be established, and presidential elections would take place. Since then, the implementation of the peace agreement has been ongoing with periodic clashes between the conflict parties. It is worth noting that not all armed groups signed the agreement, and some are still in a state of military confrontation with government forces.

In August 2022, a decision was made to extend the transitional period by another 24 months to complete ongoing reforms, and presidential elections were expected to follow.

Description of the Monitoring Period

At the current stage, there are no major, intensive clashes, but occasional skirmishes occur in different regions of the country. In November, a series of

attacks took place in the Abyei region, which is disputed between Sudan and South Sudan. As a result of these attacks, 32 people were killed. Clashes occurred between armed militants and soldiers wearing the uniform of the South Sudanese Armed Forces.

Additionally, clashes took place in one of the displacement camps in the northern part of the country, resulting in 13 fatalities.

Some points of the agreement are periodically violated; for instance, in 2023, President Salva Kiir unilaterally appointed a new defense minister from his party, although, according to the agreement, the candidacy for this position should have been chosen from representatives of the opposition party.

Casualties

The total number of deaths since the beginning of the conflict (including killed, deaths among foreign forces commissioners): over 450,000.

Humanitarian Consequences

Overall, during the conflict, 2.47 million people have fled South Sudan as refugees, 2 million have become internally displaced persons. 7.5 million people needed some form of humanitarian assistance or protection, and 7.7 million faced the threat of famine.

INTENSITY

The civil war is in a phase of low intensity with periodic outbreaks of violence.

Negotiations

Between Parties

In the summer, the inauguration of the first joint battalion of the unified armed forces of South Sudan took place, marking an important milestone in the peace process. Former fighters from armed groups were incorporated into the regular army of South Sudan according to the conditions of the 2018 peace agreement, yet their actual involvement occurred only this year when the first joint battalion was deployed to the Upper Nile state.



Instability in neighboring Sudan raises concerns about the possible exacerbation of conflicts and intensification of clashes in South Sudan, especially on the eve of the elections scheduled for 2024. It is also important to note the international dimension of the situation. South Sudan's President Salva Kiir visited Moscow twice this year: as a guest at the Russia-Africa Summit and with a personal visit in the fall, with agreements to strengthen economic cooperation. Since South Sudan has faced criticism from the U.S. for a lack of political will and slow implementation of the 2018 peace agreement, the country is building relations with Russia and China as an alternative to its foreign policy.

War Libya

EVENTS, INCIDENTS

The conflict in Libya has been ongoing since 2011, following the assassination of Muammar Gaddafi. In western Libya, the Government of National Accord, led by Fayeze Sarraj, is established. In the east, General Khalifa Haftar and his Libyan National Army oppose him.

The rest of the territory is occupied by tribes and smaller groups. Haftar is supported by Russia, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia. The Government of National Accord is backed by the UN, Turkey, and Qatar.

During the monitoring period, despite the formal end of the civil war since the end of 2020, tension and instability persist. Sporadic shootouts, clashes, and struggles for oil fields and territories occasionally occur.

There have been many incidents involving the death of migrants (February 15, March 12, April 25). As a result, at least 100 people have died. On August 16 in Tripoli, a combat clash occurred between the 444 Brigade and the Deterrence Force*, resulting in 57 deaths.

Deterrence Force or RADA - a special unit of radical Islamists from Tripoli, engaged in combating organized crime and terrorism.

Clashes also took place in October in the eastern capital - Benghazi - between the forces of Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar and a group loyal to his opponent, Colonel al-Mahdi al-Bargathi. In the western city of Garyan, eight people were killed in clashes.



Casualties

Due to the negotiation process, the number of victims has significantly decreased; however, in 2023, approximately a hundred people died overall.

Humanitarian Consequences

Libya experienced a catastrophe – a natural disaster, to be precise. Dams did not withstand the storm Daniel, and on September 10, 2023, water flooded the city of Derna. At least 4,000 people died. This caused a serious security and humanitarian crisis in the country, with climate change in Libya playing a role.

Trends

Similar problems underscore that Libya has not yet overcome the consequences of war and is largely a chaotic and weakly unified state without proper command and control over the security apparatus. The first presidential elections, initially scheduled for 2022, are now postponed indefinitely.

INTENSITY

The civil war is in a phase of low intensity, preparing for elections.

Impact on Global Processes

There is information that in December of last year, at the Al-Jufra base held by «The Wagner Group,» a Russian Il-76 transport plane was

destroyed. It regularly flew to the Syrian city of Latakia. It is known that in this way, Libya and «Wagner» supplied weapons to other conflict zones in Africa, including Sudan.



Photo from mil.in.ua

Forecast

Although the number of clashes is clearly decreasing, the challenge of uniting the broken and divided country into a single entity is still difficult to achieve. There is still no trust between the recognized UN-backed Western government and the eastern one in Tobruk. Armed struggles for power persist within major cities (Tripoli, Benghazi, Sirte). With postponed elections, there is a real threat of power usurpation by current leaders. The continuation of the migrant crisis and the unstable oil sector exacerbates the situation.

War Ethiopia

EVENTS, INCIDENTS

Ethiopia, consisting of over 90 ethnic groups, has faced typical African ethnic tensions. Factors such as population growth, unemployment, and resource struggles only exacerbate this tension. After the overthrow of the military regime in 1991, an ethnic federal governance system was introduced to address historical grievances. Various regions of Ethiopia were granted the right to self-administration, leading to the rise of ethnonationalist movements and weakening the national unity of Ethiopia. Tensions with the Tigray region escalated, turning into an armed conflict in November 2020, with the hot phase lasting until November 2022.

The Tigray ethnic group also dominates neighboring Eritrea (over 50% of the population). Eritrea is in conflict with the Tigray-led state and supports Addis Ababa (Tigray was at the forefront of the Eritrean-Ethiopian war and controls disputed territories).

During the monitoring period, a peace process is ongoing, and the conflict is in the process of resolution. However, Amhara and Eritrean forces continued to attack Tigrayans for months after the peace agreement. According to international organizations, Eritrean forces, allied with the Ethiopian government, maybe «committing war crimes and crimes against humanity» in Tigray, involving violence, enslavement, and execution of civilians months after signing the peace agreement.

Casualties

Since the start of the armed conflict with the Tigray region, over 3,000 Ethiopian military personnel have died, and more than 4,500 have been wounded. Rebels claim that up to 8,000 government soldiers have been captured. On the side of the Tigray People's Liberation Front, more than 6,000 people have died, with up to 3,000 wounded and 2,000 in captivity.

Significant civilian casualties – according to various estimates, 600,000 to 800,000 civilians have died as a result of hostilities.

International organizations have accused the government of ethnic discrimination. Representatives of the Tigrayan ethnic group were reportedly held in separate camps due to suspicions of supporting the rebels.

Humanitarian Consequences

According to international estimates, over 900,000 people have become refugees, mainly in neighboring Sudan. More than 2.75 million people have been internally displaced.

A potential humanitarian catastrophe – about 13 million people in Ethiopia depend on food aid. The situation is exacerbated by rising food prices due to the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

The situation is particularly difficult for tens of thousands of Eritrean refugees who have been living in camps in Tigray for years.

Trends

Initially, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali's government demonstrated success in waging war, stopping rebel attacks, and shifting the conflict to the Tigray region's side. However, the conflict later entered a prolonged phase of parity, prompting negotiations.

Negotiations Between Parties

Negotiations between the government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front have been ongoing since November 2022, mediated by other African and Western states. These negotiations began in Pretoria and later continued in Nairobi. The signed agreement involves the rebels' recognition of the central government, while the central government, according to the agreement, guarantees autonomy to the Tigray People's Liberation Front in governance. The main goal of the agreement is a stable ceasefire and avoidance of external force intervention (primarily referring to Eritrean forces). In mid-March 2023, the central committee of the Tigray People's Liberation Front voted to appoint Getachew Reda as the head of the Temporary Regional Administration of Tigray. On March 23, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed confirmed this decision.

Impact on Global Processes

External players, particularly Russia and the U.S., demonstrate interest in resolving the conflict. The region gains special importance as part of the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, the Red Sea, and the Suez Canal, crucial for key freight shipments, including petroleum products.

In previous years, U.S. sanctions for human rights violations and a more lenient policy heightened the risk of Ethiopia drifting toward Russia and China. However, Ethiopia relies significantly on Ukrainian grain supplies and actively advocates for the normalization of supply routes. Specifically, grain has been supplied to Ethiopia from Ukraine as part of the Grain from Ukraine program since November. The peace process has created conditions for the restoration of contacts with the West, as evidenced by a more positive attitude toward Ukraine (during Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov's visit to Ethiopia, a representative of the relevant rank of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spoke with him, while Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ali Ahmed met with the Ukrainian Foreign Minister).

Simultaneously, relations with pro-Russian Eritrea are intensifying at the end of 2023. The

head of the Ethiopian army requested officials in neighboring Eritrea to withdraw all their forces from Ethiopian territory, according to two sources familiar with the situation.

In November 2023, Berhanu Jula, Chief of Staff of the Ethiopian Army, sent a signed letter to his Eritrean counterpart, demanding the withdrawal of all Eritrean forces from Ethiopian territory. Ethiopia's request coincided with the U.S. statement on Sunday about imposing «broad-based» economic sanctions aimed at pushing Eritrea to cease violence in Tigray. According to some sources, the Ethiopian leadership is considering the possibility of intervention (also needed for the recovery of the Ethiopian economy through cheaper access to Eritrean seaports).

INTENSITY

Civil war, internal political crisis with periodic clashes and increasing inter-ethnic tension, and diplomatic conflict. In the resolution phase.



Forecast

Considering the progress of peace negotiations, stabilization can be expected in the coming years. However, the unresolved causes and involvement of external forces (Eritrea, Sudan, and potentially Russian influences) require greater attention from the international community.

Myanmar War

EVENTS, INCIDENTS

Throughout 2023, the authorities of Myanmar (State Administrative Council) and various ethnic insurgent groups focused on conducting military operations in the east and southeast of the country: Myanmar's airstrikes on positions of the Kachin Independence Army, operations 1027 (started on October 27) and 1107 (started on November 7) led by the Union of Three Brotherhoods, military formations of the Kayah ethnic group, etc. Large-scale hostilities began at the end of October 2023.



Casualties

- 363 civilian deaths and 277 injuries
- 372 Myanmar military personnel were killed and 1 Myanmar police officer killed
- 688 Myanmar military personnel captured
- 4 insurgents killed
- 1 Chinese civilian killed and several injured (on Chinese territory after shelling by Myanmar Armed Forces)
- 335,000 internally displaced persons



Trends

During operations 1027 and 1107, various ethnic military groups managed to gain control of parts of the Myanmar-Chinese and Myanmar-Indian borders, as well as capture several military bases and cities: Kalay (Sagaing Region), Rihocdar (Chin State), Poutamyio (Rakhine State), etc. Representatives of the military junta already publicly acknowledge the possibility of the country's split. Overall, considering the preservation of territories gained by various insurgent groups, the Myanmar Armed Forces may face mass desertions and personnel surrender. This has already happened in clashes with militants on the border with India. However, caution should be exercised in assessing the rebels' ability to sustain long-term offensives.



INTENSITY

Civil War

Negotiations Between Parties

On November 3, China called on the parties to an immediate ceasefire as Union of Three Brotherhoods militants seized Myanmar Armed Forces hostages on the border with China. On November 6, China demanded cooperation from Myanmar's incumbent military junta to ensure the safety of Chinese citizens. Before this, the Myanmar Armed Forces shelled Chinese territory.

On December 11, the State Administrative Council of Myanmar initiated negotiations with the Union of Three Brotherhoods with China's mediation. On December 16, despite the ceasefire, militants seized the city of Namsang (Shan State).



Impact on Global Processes

Firstly, Myanmar has become an exporter of refugees to neighboring states—India, Thailand, Bangladesh, and China. Secondly, the UN has stated that opium production in Myanmar has exceeded Afghanistan's volumes. Accordingly, the share of the Golden Triangle (mountainous regions of Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand, where opium is clandestinely produced) in global drug trafficking is increasing, leading to predictable

turf wars in this industry.

Thirdly, there is a threat of the war spreading to the borders of China, India, and Thailand. The latter has been fighting separatists in the south of the country since 2004, as well as local drug cartels. Given the purely ethnic nature of the conflict and the ethnic diversity of Southeast Asia, uncontrolled circulation of weapons and money obtained from drug sales may lead to the activation of separatists in Myanmar's neighboring countries.

Currently, the situation in Myanmar is dynamic, as various ethnic insurgent groups are actively advancing, and the Myanmar Armed Forces are suffering defeats. It is evident that the opposition to the military junta cannot sustain the offensive momentum for long. However, in the case of continued mass surrender and desertion, the military junta may lose power. China and India may also intervene in the situation, as they are interested in security buffers on their borders with Myanmar. Additionally, the ethnic diversity within the opposition should not be overlooked. For instance, the same division of control over opium cultivation in Shan State may lead to internal conflicts within the opposition. Moreover, some insurgent groups are currently nominal and situational allies.

War

Central African Republic

EVENTS, INCIDENTS

The war in the country has been ongoing with intermittent periods since 2012. The main conflict is between the Muslim North (Alliance of Seleka rebels) and the Christian South, which retains control over the capital, Bangui, and supports the central government. Religious community conflicts are escalating, with documented instances of genocide. The presence of UN peacekeepers, primarily the French (whose zone of influence includes the CAR), has been ineffective.

During the monitoring period, there is noticeable activity of Russian mercenaries from the PMC «Wagner,» supporting the central government. They serve as the main security for President Faustin-Archange Touadéra.

Regular clashes with insurgents continue during the monitoring period. Both government soldiers and Russian mercenaries are killed in regular skirmishes. Some notable incidents include: In early January 2023, during clashes in the Goundi area, two Russians and four soldiers were killed, and ten more were injured. During an attempt to capture an injured Russian fighter, a rebel general was wounded. At the end of January, government forces took control of Gounda, Gordil, and Ndah after clashes with insurgents. Dozens of people were killed, including seven Russian mercenaries.

In February, after withdrawing from the city of Gordil, government forces bombed the city with helicopters, forcing the majority of the civilian population and insurgents to leave the city.

On March 13, three Chinese citizens were kidnapped by armed individuals near Abby in the Nana-Mambéré prefecture. They were eventually released in early April. On March 19, armed individuals attacked the Chimbolo mines near Bambari, killing nine Chinese citizens. The

insurgents denied responsibility.

On March 30, rebels attacked the Russian base in Niem, resulting in the deaths of two Russians.

In early April 2023, clashes between Wagner mercenaries and Coalition of Patriots for Change fighters were recorded in the Oham Pendé prefecture.

On April 23, the Azande self-defense group repelled an attack by the South Sudanese militia from the territory of the neighboring state in the Bamuti area.

On May 14, Chadian forces began an operation against Chadian rebels north of Paua in the Central African Republic, allegedly destroying two bases, killing 12, and arresting 30 rebels.

In May, soldiers from the Democratic Republic of the Congo crossed the border, attacking an Anti-balaka base near Kuango. Several people were killed.

On June 20, Azande insurgents launched another attack on the city of Mboki, but the attack was repelled. According to reports, at least 40 fighters and four civilians were killed on both sides.

On July 10, Rwandan peacekeepers conducted an operation against insurgents near the town of Sam Ouandja.

On September 10, three Russian mercenaries were killed during a clash with 3R insurgents near Nguya-Buar.

INTENSITY

Low-intensity phase of the civil war.

Negotiations

Between Parties

Ceasefire negotiations are ongoing, and actively supported by Russia (which has established relations with the capital authorities—financial support and the presence of Russian mercenaries). The desire for negotiations is stimulated by the demands of external donors who have reduced financial aid to the country.

Impact on Global Processes

Russia is trying to strengthen its influence in certain African countries, demonstrating cooperation opportunities to other dictatorial regimes. Russian instructors train the government army, actively supplying weapons and military equipment. Precious metals and other easily accessible resources are exported from the CAR, mainly through the Cameroonian port of Douala. This includes the company International Global Logistic (IGL), founded by the Central African Anour Magidou, which likely operates

in contact with Roman and Vitaly Perfileyev in the CAR. Also, this route is used to import cheap Nigerian alcohol into the CAR. Given the increased activity of Russian mercenaries in combating opposition groups in the CAR, it is conducted along the highway from Douala to Bangui.

After the suppression of the uprising, there was a reformatting of Russian presence, but the CAR remains the main base for Moscow in the region. There is information about storing valuables and currency reserves of the Russian elite in the country. Additionally, Wagner mercenaries recruit local residents for the war in Ukraine.

Casualties

Over 7,000 combatants and tens of thousands of civilians died during the conflict (exact data is unknown).

Humanitarian Consequences

Over 300,000 refugees to neighboring countries, and over 700,000 internally displaced persons.

Forecast

In 2023, the government controls more territory than ever since the start of the war in 2012.

The intensification of Russian activity in the region has reached its peak, causing increasing resistance from other players, particularly France and Turkey. However, opponents of Russia are forced to react in new areas, including Nigeria and Mali.

Therefore, Russia's influence in the CAR will remain powerful. At the same time, there is noticeable involvement of neighboring states, responding to attacks by armed groups on the border. Over the past year, operations by the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, and militias (militias) from the border regions of South Sudan have been recorded.

Border Conflict

India – Pakistan



Impact on Global Processes

The incident itself does not have a global impact. However, the conflict between India and Pakistan over the territory of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, ongoing since 1947, is decisive. The absence of a compromise between New Delhi and Islamabad, even on the issue of negotiations, contributes to maintaining tension in the region. This year's incident, like several previous ones, pushes Pakistan towards closer cooperation with China, which also has territorial disputes with India in the region (Aksai Chin and the Shaksgam Valley) and with Turkey (military ties). At the same time, India collaborates with Russia on various issues, with New Delhi becoming the main consumer of Russian products after Moscow lost the European oil market.

EVENTS, INCIDENTS

On June 24, 2023, Indian military personnel on the Line of Control with Pakistan opened fire on Kashmiri shepherds near the village of Tatrinnote (administrative territory of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan). The incident marked the first violation of the 2021 ceasefire.



Casualties

Two civilians were killed and one was injured.



Trends

Given that both New Delhi and Islamabad have not yet developed a common negotiating ground, breakthroughs in resolving the Jammu and Kashmir issue are unlikely. Therefore, similar border clashes will periodically occur depending on political circumstances or contingencies.

INTENSITY

Border incident.

Negotiations Between Parties

Direct negotiations regarding this incident have not taken place. However, both parties have repeatedly stated their positions on this issue. On August 1, 2023, then Prime Minister of Pakistan, Shahbaz Sharif, expressed readiness for talks with India. On August 3, the U.S. publicly supported such a statement, advocating for the normalization of relations between New Delhi and Islamabad. Meanwhile, India emphasized the need for a terror-free environment.

On December 6, the Indian Parliament passed two laws regarding the union territory disputed with Pakistan (Jammu and Kashmir), causing resentment in Pakistan.



Forecast

Considering that Pakistan and India are gradually entering the campaign for parliamentary elections in February and April-May 2024, no shifts in negotiations on Jammu and Kashmir should be expected. At the same time, it should be noted that the likelihood of similar incidents may increase. However, given the Russian-Ukrainian war, China's presence in the region (Aksai Chin and the Shaksgam Valley), and the presence of nuclear weapons in both states, a rapid intensification and escalation of the conflict is unlikely.

D R C o n g o LOCAL CONFLICTS



EVENTS, INCIDENTS

After a six-month lull in the North Kivu region, clashes resumed in October between the Armed Forces of the DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo) and the March 23 Movement (M23). The ceasefire, facilitated by current regional initiatives under the auspices of the East African Community (EAC) and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), known as the Nairobi and Luanda processes, was violated, and M23 regained control of several territories in the region. Regional EAC forces (EACRF), deployed in the eastern part of the DRC as part of regional initiatives, also came under fire during the recent rounds of fighting. In October, a Ugandan convoy was ambushed, resulting in

two soldiers being wounded, and a Kenyan soldier was killed in another attack. M23 accuses Burundian forces of supporting armed groups and rebels. Burundi denies the accusations, and the EAC statement refuted claims against the Burundian contingent of EACRF.

The latest round of fighting is approaching Sake, a city 20 kilometers from Goma, the regional capital, raising concerns that the city might fall into the hands of M23. On November 3, MONUSCO (United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Congo) and FARDC (Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo) initiated a joint operation codenamed «Springbok» aimed at protecting Goma. The most challenging situation has developed in the eastern part of the country,

where over 120 armed groups vie for power, resources, and the protection of their communities.

In late December, Felix Tshisekedi was re-elected as the President of the DRC for a second term despite opposition claims, which termed the voting a «farce.»

Clashes erupted in the country between opposition supporters and the police. Tear gas was used as protesters, throwing stones and barricading themselves in the opposition headquarters, clashed with law enforcement.

INTENSITY
Local conflict.



Forecast

THE STATUS OF THE CONFLICT REMAINS UNCHANGED, CHARACTERIZED BY A HIGH LEVEL OF VIOLENCE, BRUTAL ATTACKS, AND MILITARY ACTIONS BY REBEL GROUPS IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO, PRIMARILY IN THE NORTH KIVU AND ITURI PROVINCES. APPARENTLY, IN THE NEAR FUTURE, THE GOVERNMENT WILL NOT BE ABLE TO DO SO WITHOUT THE ASSISTANCE OF THE UN ARMY. THE ALREADY HOPELESS SITUATION IS FURTHER INTENSIFIED BY THE ADDITIONAL THREAT OF ETHNIC VIOLENCE.

Casualties

Hundreds of government soldiers and rebels, as well as hundreds of civilians, have been killed.

Humanitarian Consequences

The lack of security has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis. As of 2023, the DRC has over 6.3 million internally displaced persons.

The resumption of hostilities between M23 fighters and the Congolese armed forces has forced over 500,000 people to flee their homes since October. Outbreaks of cholera and measles, along with gender-based violence, further complicate the dire humanitarian situation.

Impact on Global Processes

The resumption of hostilities has heightened tensions between the DRC and Rwanda. The risk of direct confrontation between the DRC and Rwanda, both accusing each other of supporting M23 on one side and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda on the other, remains real. The buildup of military strength in both countries, the lack of direct high-level dialogue, and the persistence of hate speech are alarming signs that could lead to a large-scale conflict. The influence of Russia, whose mercenaries have been spotted in eastern DRC, also remains a threat.

Trends

International efforts are focused on combating illegal mineral extraction in conflict-affected regions. However, UN investigators state that rebel groups and criminal elements within the DRC army are smuggling minerals abroad, bypassing government bans on metal exports, particularly towards neighboring Rwanda.



Afghanistan

LOCAL CONFLICTS



EVENTS, INCIDENTS

August 30, 2021, is considered the date marking the conclusion of the extensive war in Afghanistan. It began on October 7, 2001, when the United States, with support from NATO allies, intervened in Afghanistan, overthrowing the Islamist movement «Taliban.» However, the Taliban persisted in guerrilla warfare, eventually regaining power after two decades of conflict. Now known as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the country is in partial international isolation, seeking global recognition.

Since then, the conflict has taken the form of skirmishes between the forces of the new government and the Republican National Resistance Front. During the monitoring period in Afghanistan, clashes occurred in the Panjshir province. The Panjshir conflict began immediately after the Taliban seized Kabul in August 2021, but since then, the resistance movement's activity has been reduced to partisan actions in the northeast. Currently, the National Front does not control territories but carries out guerrilla attacks.

After the Taliban's victory in Afghanistan, the Islamic State (Horasan group) has become more

active. In 2023, a series of terrorist attacks took place, including at Kabul Airport and the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs building. During the last attack, 5 people were killed, and over 40 were injured. Similar terrorist attacks occur several times a month in various cities in the country.

In the fight against the Islamic State, the Taliban often collaborates with the United States.



Casualties

The Panjshir conflict claimed the lives of over 950 military personnel of the new government, with over 1,500 injured. There is no precise data on the losses of insurgents, but they were substantial, likely resulting in several thousand deaths.

Dozens of civilians have died, and hundreds have been injured as a result of Islamic State attacks.



Impact on Global Processes

Afghanistan is within the immediate sphere of China's interests, as the country is located in the zone of the Chinese «Belt and Road Initiative» investment project. Beijing has already become one of the largest creditors of the new government in exchange for the use of trade infrastructure.

Despite negative expectations, the Taliban does not create favorable conditions for advancing Russian interests in the region. Kabul seeks understanding with the U.S. as the guarantor of its recognition to gain access to external markets.

Afghanistan also serves as a factor hindering Iran's progress to the east. Official Tehran repeats the stance of not recognizing the Taliban government. Armed clashes occurred on the border between the countries throughout the year.

INTENSITY

A high-intensity local conflict with numerous casualties.

Negotiations

Between Parties

Despite Taliban attempts to negotiate a ceasefire, the resistance movement continues its activities, albeit on a smaller scale. Some forces in the United States call for supporting the rebels, but they do not receive significant foreign support.

Trends

Currently, the primary efforts of the new Afghan government are focused on international recognition. This process is happening more slowly than Kabul would prefer. Afghanistan is facing a severe economic crisis, with most of the population living below the poverty line. Among the main reasons for this is the country's disconnection from the international trade system.

However, recognition is a matter of time. Afghanistan's return to the international community is expected to positively impact the prospects of avoiding armed conflicts in the future.



Forecast

International recognition of the Taliban within the next few years. Regular bloody terrorist attacks will continue in 2024.

LOCAL CONFLICTS



EVENTS, INCIDENTS

Mali is located in the Sahel region, which has been facing terrorist attacks from jihadists. Political tension in Mali escalated in 2020 when, after months of protests, a military coup took place on August 18. President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta was ousted, and power shifted to a military junta. On September 21, 2020, an interim president, Bah Ndaou, and a vice president, the leader of the military junta, Assimi Goïta, were appointed. The transitional period in the country was supposed to last for 18 months, followed by elections.

However, after 9 months, another forceful change of power occurred in the country. On the evening of May 24, 2021, a military coup took place in Mali, with the temporary president Bah Ndaou, the government, and the country's prime minister taken into custody. On May 26, the country's political leadership signed documents relinquishing power, the government was dissolved, and Colonel Assimi Goïta, the leader of the previous coup, became the president of the country. The reason for the coup lies in the political arena: several key figures involved in the previous coup were removed from power.

After the coup, the junta promised to hold elections in 2022. However, in February 2022, a law was passed allowing the military to remain in power for up to five years.

Simultaneously, planned elections were postponed, leading to significant criticism from the international community.

The country faces a high level of terrorist threats with constant incidents and civilian casualties. The

Mali

geography of jihadist attacks is expanding: initially, they occurred only in the northern part of the country, but since 2022, they have extended to the central part and near the capital.

After the events of 2020, Mali tended towards Russia: French and European contingents ceased operations in the country, and the UN mission was discontinued. Since 2022, the Wagner Group mercenaries have been operating in Mali.

Monitoring Period Description

In 2023, Mali experienced two conflicts: the junta-jihadists and the junta-Tuaregs.

The junta-jihadists confrontation has expanded to new territories in northern Mali, with a series of large-scale attacks on military positions, blockades of cities, and major transportation routes. Terrorist attacks occur regularly. Violence against civilians has increased by 38% (data from January-July 2023 by ACLED). Main actors: JNIM (Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin) (over 180 events, 33%), Mali's military forces and/or the Wagner Group (almost 160 events, 29%), and ISIS in the Sahel (almost 90 events, 15%).

Since August, clashes have been ongoing between the Mali army and the Tuaregs (officially known as the Coordination of Azawad Movements - CMA). The Tuaregs' efforts to establish their state have been ongoing since the 1960s. Their most recent major uprising, from 2012 to 2015, ended with an agreement guaranteeing autonomy for the Azawad region, signed by the Tuaregs with the legitimate government of Mali.

INTENSITY

Internal conflict, terrorist acts.

Negotiations

Between Parties

On June 18, 2023, a constitutional referendum took place in Mali. The new constitution was approved by 97% of votes cast, with a voter turnout of 38% of registered voters. The new constitution significantly expanded the powers of the president and the armed forces. In particular, the president can intervene in government policies and has the right to dissolve parliament. In September 2023, after the ceasefire with the Tuareg rebels collapsed, the Malian junta postponed elections indefinitely due to «technical reasons.»

After two coups, the agreement remained in effect as long as the UN stabilization mission, MINUSMA, operated in the country. On June 30, 2023, the Mali junta demanded MINUSMA to leave the country by the end of the year due to inaction. This triggered an escalation with the Tuaregs, accusing the Mali government and the Wagner Group of violating the 2015 ceasefire agreement, especially in the army's attempt to control bases in northern Mali previously occupied by MINUSMA.

In September, the Tuaregs took control of the town of Bourem. In early November, the Malian army initiated a ground offensive involving Wagner Group mercenaries. On November 14, the Malian army announced the conquest of the strategically important city of Kidal in the northeast (controlled by Tuareg separatists for years). Accusations of atrocities committed against the civilian population during the Malian army and Russian mercenaries' advance were made, but these allegations were repeatedly denied by the authorities. In December, the Tuaregs announced a blockade of roads in northern Mali to halt the army's progress.

Casualties

Over 844 people have died at the hands of terrorists in the first half of 2023.

Impact on Global Processes

Mali has definitively severed cooperation with the United States, France, and the UN, relying on Russia and Wagner Group mercenaries to address security issues. In addition to strengthening Russia's influence in the Sahel, the expansion of propaganda channels and the activities of Russian mercenaries in Mali directly affect the Russian-Ukrainian war.

According to The Blood Gold Report, the Kremlin earned over \$2.5 billion from the trade of African gold since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. This figure relates to three countries - Mali, the Central African Republic, and Sudan. The monthly payment for Wagner Group services in Mali is \$10.8 million (for 1000 mercenaries). Mali has numerous foreign companies involved in the mining industry, paying taxes to the Malian treasury, which is then used by the junta to pay Wagner Group mercenaries.

Forecast

Instability in Mali will persist in both conflicts. Wagner Group mercenaries are not effectively countering terrorist attacks, and after the withdrawal of French forces, terrorist activity has intensified. The escalation of their activities in Mali, and the expansion of the attacking territory, may lead to the spread of terrorist activity to other countries in the region and worsen the situation in Burkina Faso and Niger, which face similar threats.

Burkina Faso

LOCAL CONFLICTS



Casualties



Over the past few years, more than 2,000 people have died, and over 1.5 million have become refugees.



Impact on Global Processes

Paris concluded the anti-terrorism operation «Barkhane» conducted in the «three borders» zone involving Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali. Instead of France, Russian influence is strengthening in the region. Since the beginning of 2022, the country has gradually shifted into the orbit of Russian influence. According to the president of Ghana, Burkina Faso has invited «Wagner Group» mercenaries, expecting access to gold mines.

On October 13, 2023, «Rosatom» and Burkina Faso signed a memorandum of understanding on the construction of a nuclear power plant.

In September, Burkina Faso and Mali (where there is also a pro-Russian junta in power) formed a military alliance. Moscow also announces plans to create a military «African Corps» for operations on the continent.

EVENTS, INCIDENTS

Since the beginning of 2022, a military junta led by Ibrahim Traoré, relying on support from Russia, has been in power. Together with Mali, they have gradually succeeded in the withdrawal of French contingents from the country. However, the situation has not stabilized, and Islamist groups are actively operating in the provinces.

During the monitoring period, jihadists killed 44 civilians from April 6 to April 7 in the Seno province.

On April 15, insurgents attacked a military detachment in the Wahiguya department. The authorities reported the deaths of 6 soldiers and 34 members of the volunteer formation «Homeland Defense» (VDP), but other sources suggested that the death toll could reach 75 people.

On April 20, possibly in response to the attack in Aorema, government forces and volunteers carried out a massacre in Karmi, where the majority of the 400 residents were Mossi. Soldiers reportedly rounded up peaceful civilians and executed them in their homes. While official sources claimed that at least sixty people were killed, witnesses asserted that the death toll was around 200.

On September 5, dozens of people died in clashes in the Yatenga province.

On November 5, an unknown group carried out a massacre in the village of Zaongo. It was reported that at least 70 people, mainly children and the elderly, were killed.

On November 26, about 3000 jihadists launched a major attack on Djibo, resulting in the deaths of at least 40 civilians and reportedly 400 jihadists.

Forecast

Burkina Faso has become another weak link among the Sahel states, where Islamist groups are actively strengthening. Against this background, strong influences from Moscow are evident in the military government.

The pro-Russian orientation of Ibrahim Traoré will allow Russia to further enhance its influence in the region, primarily through military cooperation.

INTENSITY

Terrorist activity.

S o m a l i a

EVENTS, INCIDENTS

The internationally recognized government continues to control the capital and limited territories. Local groups are in conflict, particularly in February 2023, when a conflict erupted between Somaliland (controlling the northern part of the country) and the Hatumo Administration around the city of Las Anod. Hatumo forces seized almost all military bases and towns in the Sol region, but fighting continued.

There is significant jihadist activity, particularly from the «Al-Shabaab» group.

The Somali army initiated strikes against «Al-Shabaab» bases in the Galmudug state, in cooperation with local fighters from the Gedi clan. In January, the towns of Harardhere and Galkayo were captured. The United States joined the operation, conducting drone strikes.

In March, it was reported that «Al-Shabaab» lost one-third of its territory in Somalia after the government launched a major military offensive in August 2022. On May 26, the «Al-Shabaab» group carried out a suicide attack on the peacekeepers' military base in Buulo-Mareer, using improvised explosive devices on vehicles and suicide terrorists. Ugandan troops discovered the bodies of 54 Ugandan soldiers who died during the attack. On September 17, over 200 Ethiopian National Defense Force fighters were killed/captured by «Al-Shabaab» militants in the Bakol region.

Impact on Global Processes

Since 2022, the African Union has been conducting a peacekeeping mission, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). However, the African Union plans to withdraw the majority of troops by the end of 2024, introducing additional risks.

On December 1, the UN Security Council unanimously lifted the arms embargo on Somalia after more than 30 years since the first embargo was imposed. Fourteen countries voted in favor, one abstained. At the same time, the Security Council extended sanctions and an arms embargo against «Al-Shabaab.»

Strengthening the central government may enhance the influence of its external patron, Kenya, especially amid Ethiopia's unfriendly policies. In January 2024, Ethiopia signed an agreement with the unrecognized Somaliland region led by Muse Bihi Abdi, allowing Addis Ababa to gain free access to the sea in the Gulf of Aden, effectively recognizing the sovereignty of the region, which most of the world considers part of Somalia.

Kenya's alliance with the USA indicates an increased presence of Washington. Simultaneously, the internationally recognized Somali government consistently supports the Western position and the Ukrainian stance in the war with Russia.

Casualties

Several hundred people have died, and hundreds have been injured.

Forecast

The population of Somalia is exhausted by the activities of Islamist groups, but the government lacks resources for a rapid restoration of control over the territory. This process will be slow, especially if the internationally recognized government of Somalia receives external assistance.

INTENSITY

Local conflict, terrorist acts.

Nigeria

LOCAL CONFLICTS



EVENTS, INCIDENTS

In the Lake Chad region, along the borders of Cameroon, Niger, Chad, and Nigeria, there continues to be active Islamist activity by «Boko Haram.» Simultaneously, conflicts arise between them and their competitors, the Islamist group «Islamic State West Africa Province» (ISWAP). The increasing number of attacks on Christian churches intensifies distrust of the government and undermines stability prospects in Nigeria. Additionally, tensions are expected to rise in the Sahel region, leading to new waves of refugees. There is also an increase in the activities of insurgent movements in the Niger Delta (the separatists of «Biafra»), the Yoruba in the southwest, and various semi-bandit groups. Conflicts persist in the north between settled farmers and Fulani herders over access to pastures and water resources.

During the monitoring period, attacks in the northern part of the country continued.

On January 7, 35 ISWAP fighters died in a battle with «Boko Haram» in the Lake Chad region.

On January 28, 32 members of «Boko Haram,» including the

commander, were killed by Nigerian soldiers in Konduz.

On February 4, 41 people were killed after clashes between bandits and the militia in the Katsina state.

On April 15, bandits attacked the village of Rundji in the Kaduna state, killing 33 people and burning over 40 houses.

On March 10, at least 25 fishermen were killed by «Boko Haram» in the Borno state.

On April 4, eighteen «Boko Haram» fighters were killed by the Nigerian army in the Sambisa forest.

On June 5, 36 people were killed after bandits attacked six villages in the northern part of the country.

On June 10, at least 120 bandits on motorcycles killed 55 people and abducted dozens from two villages in Niger state.

On June 27, members of «Boko Haram» killed one of their leaders, Abu Hassan, after he allegedly tried to form a separate faction.

On August 17, at least 82 terrorists died in internal ethnic clashes within «Boko Haram» in the Borno state.

On July 25, bandits killed 34 people in Zamfara state.

On August 13, bandits ambushed

Nigerian security forces, killing 23 soldiers and three civilians. The helicopter rescuing people from the scene also crashed due to gunfire.

On August 15, 13 military personnel died after a clash in Niger state, and 50 bandits were killed.

On August 21, «Boko Haram» kidnapped 49 women in the Shuwaey Kawuwa village. They were later released after a state ransom.

On August 24, at least 41 Islamists were killed in clashes between ISWAP and «Boko Haram» in the Lake Chad region. These clashes repeated in November.

On October 30-31, «Boko Haram» militants invaded the Gurukaya village in the Yobe state, killing 37 civilians.

On December 2, the Nigerian military announced that in the last seven days, they killed 180 terrorists and arrested 204.

INTENSITY

Local conflict, terrorism.



Trends

According to estimates, 24.9 million Nigerians are facing a crisis or worsening hunger, including 1.1 million in a state of emergency. Irregular rainfall in the country, coupled with violent conflicts between farmers and herders competing for access to fields, hampers efforts for self-sufficiency. The Nigerian government launched programs to provide loans to farmers and increase domestic grain production in 2023. However, extreme weather and violence from both bands and farmers and herders conflicting over field access hinder these efforts. Nigeria has been unable to produce enough wheat to overcome the gap in supply of over 5 million metric tons.

These events, against the backdrop of economic stagnation, erode trust in the government. This is one of the reasons for Nigeria's reluctance to intervene quickly in neighboring Niger after the pro-Russian coup. However, the frequency of clashes on the northern borders is increasing.



Humanitarian Consequences

Throughout the conflict, over 2 million people have fled their homes. The situation remains tense in the Borno province, preventing refugees from returning home.



Casualties

During the Boko Haram crisis, up to 30,000 people have been killed, with over 22,000 considered missing. During the monitoring period, at least several hundred people were killed.

THE WEAKENING OF NIGERIA—THE SECOND-LARGEST ECONOMY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA. PRESIDENT MUHAMMADU BUHARI IS ACCUSED OF BEING UNABLE TO GUARANTEE THE SECURITY OF THE POPULATION, CONTRIBUTING TO INSTABILITY THROUGHOUT WEST AFRICA.

SUPPORT FOR THE SEPARATIST IDEAS OF „BIAFRA“ (OIL-RICH STATES OF THE NIGER DELTA) IS GROWING IN THE SOUTHEAST, AND SEPARATISM OF THE YORUBA IS EMERGING IN THE SOUTHWEST. THE GOVERNMENT IS UNABLE TO STOP BANDITRY AND COASTAL PIRACY.

THE INTENSIFICATION OF INSTABILITY AND THE EXACERBATION OF RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN A 200 MILLION-STRONG STATE THREATENS A LARGE-SCALE CONFLICT IN THE MEDIUM TERM. THE WEAKENING OF NIGERIA, THE SECOND-LARGEST ECONOMY IN AFRICA, WILL AFFECT THE ENTIRE REGION, LEADING TO REDUCED OVERALL SECURITY, INCREASED INSTABILITY, HEIGHTENED REGIONAL TENSIONS, DECREASED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND REDUCED COOPERATION. HOWEVER, THE POSSIBILITY OF STABILIZATION REMAINS UNDER THE CONDITION OF CONSENSUS BETWEEN THE ELITES OF THE CHRISTIAN SOUTH AND THE MUSLIM NORTH.

Chad

LOCAL CONFLICTS

EVENTS, INCIDENTS



In 2021, presidential elections were held in Chad, and Idriss Déby emerged victorious, securing this position for the sixth time. The armed group «Front for Change and Concord in Chad» (FACT), considered close to the Libyan military commander Khalifa Haftar, attacked a Chadian military border post. Forces from the «Military Command Council for the Salvation of the Republic» (CCMSR) and other groups joined them. On April 20, President Idriss Déby was killed, just a day after being declared the election winner. Temporary control of the country passed to the military, led by the late president's son, Mahamat Idriss Déby.

Amid widespread public protests against the military takeover in Chad, the National Transitional Council was organized to demonstrate the military's readiness to relinquish power. In January 2022, the Chadian government dismissed many opposition figures. The following month, the transitional military government accused opponents from the «Union of Rebel Forces» (UFR) of attempting to enlist Wagner PMC mercenaries to aid them in the

uprisings.

On July 29, 2021, the National Transitional Council presented a roadmap for restoring democracy in Chad. In March 2022, further peace talks took place in Doha, Qatar, involving the Déby regime and several rebel groups, including FACT, CCMSR, and UFK. Over 20 rebel groups officially withdrew from the Doha talks in mid-July 2022. On August 7, 2022, the Chadian military government signed an agreement with 42 opposition groups. However, five other rebel factions, including FACT, refused to join the agreement.

Events During the Monitoring Period

On December 17, a referendum on a new constitution took place in Chad, with 86% of voters approving it. The country's military leaders promoted the new constitution as a crucial step towards returning to civilian rule. The constitution enshrines a unitary system of government. Elections are scheduled for November of the following year.

Forecast

Chad, unlike Mali or Niger, is making certain progressive steps towards holding elections and transferring power. A transitional parliament and council have been formed, and many imprisoned activists were pardoned in 2023. The referendum, according to many analysts, paved the way to ensure the victory of the incumbent leader, Mahamat Idriss Déby, in the upcoming elections.

INTENSITY

Local conflict.

Mozambique

EVENTS, INCIDENTS

Since 2017, the gas-rich northern province of Cabo Delgado has been suffering from attacks by terrorists belonging to the Islamic State Central Africa Province. Their goal is to establish an Islamic caliphate in the region. All of this is exacerbated by public anger over the unfair distribution of income from the exploitation of the region and the marginalization of the local Muslim population.

Significant increases in the number of attacks began in 2020. Throughout 2021, the main clashes in the Cabo Delgado province occurred in the areas of Palma, Nangade, Mocimboa, and Macomia. In the summer, the armed forces of partner countries—Rwanda and members of the Southern African Development Community—initiated a joint operation in Mozambique, during which parts of the cities were liberated.

In 2022, there was a significant escalation of confrontation with the expansion of geography and an increase in casualties. At the beginning of the year, the central area of the Cabo Delgado province remained the main arena of confrontation. However, in June 2022, a new terrorist offensive began, during which the conflict zone expanded to neighboring areas—Ankuba, Chiure, and Mecufi, which were previously peaceful.

Description of the monitoring period

Thanks to cooperation with partners, Mozambique has managed to significantly weaken the activities of terrorists. In May, Mozambican forces regained control of Lake Inguri. In late July, the leader of the terrorists, Bonomade Machude Omar, was announced to be liquidated.

Humanitarian Consequences

Over 5 years of conflict: 1.5 million people needed some form of humanitarian assistance.

Approximately 950,000 people were internally displaced.

Impact on Global Processes

Mozambique has a fairly long history of cooperation with Russia. However, since the intensification of Ukraine's relations with the African continent, Kyiv has intensified its dialogue with this country: in 2022, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba visited Mozambique, and the opening of a Ukrainian embassy in the country is planned. Political bilateral consultations have been introduced. At the same time, the President of Mozambique was present at the Russia-Africa Summit and had a personal meeting with Vladimir Putin. Sergei Lavrov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, also visited this country during his trips.

Casualties

Over the 5 years of the conflict, between 4,000 and 6,000 people have been killed. Among the victims are foreign military commissioners.

Forecast

It can be expected that the struggle for support of this country between Ukraine (Western bloc) and Russia will continue.

INTENSITY

High-intensity conflict with numerous casualties, and terrorist acts.

LOCAL CONFLICTS

Cameroon

EVENTS, INCIDENTS



The conflict in Cameroon between the government and the English-speaking minority traces its roots back to the colonial period when the country's territory was divided between Britain and France. After gaining independence, Cameroon had a federal structure, replaced by a unitary one in 1972, leading to a wave of resistance. Since then, dissatisfaction in the region has grown, culminating in an armed conflict in 2016. On October 1, 2017, Ambazonia declared independence in the former Southern Cameroon territory. The central government still controls major cities, while the other side controls parts of rural areas.

During the monitoring period, there was active engagement by Anglophone separatists, and supporters of the Ambazonia's secession (a region on the border with Nigeria where English is dominant). In January, the Cameroonian Armed Forces announced the deployment of dozens of troops in Oku, Kumbo, and Jakiri, killing 11 separatists. The Ambazonia Defense Forces (ADF) claimed an expansion of their territory. On September 19, the Cameroonian army raided a separatist base in Mofako-Butu, in the Meme region, killing «Field Marshal Bitter Cola,» the communication secretary of the Ambazonia People's Liberation Council (APLC), and a leader in the Fako region.

On November 6, militants carried out a massacre in Egbekaw (Mamfe region), killing at least 20 civilians and setting fire to 15 buildings. At least 15 people were kidnapped, and an unknown number were sexually assaulted. The «Tigers Manju» group claimed responsibility, seeking revenge for the death of one of its fighters.

The situation on the Bakassi Peninsula, disputed with Nigeria, is escalating. Since August 14, 2008, the Bakassi Peninsula has belonged to Cameroon according to a decision by the International Court of Justice. However, the Nigerian Senate does not recognize this, supporting rebels from the «Democratic Republic of Bakassi» and allied groups, including the Biafra National League (BNL). BNL militants killed two Cameroonian soldiers in the Abana area in January 2023. Following this, a Cameroonian rapid response battalion captured BNL commander Henry Edet. In September 2023, Cameroonian forces launched an offensive against BNL, ousting them from the town of Abana.

On October 15, the Nigerian 13th Brigade launched Operation «Still Waters 3» in the Ikingi port to combat local piracy. In November 2023, marine commandos reclaimed oil fields from insurgents. Cameroon employed drones against militants.

Humanitarian Consequences

In recent years, over 700,000 people have become refugees, tens of thousands of Anglophones fled to neighboring Nigeria, and over 2,000 people have died. In Anglophone regions, 800,000 children are not attending school, and one in three of the four million people requires assistance.

INTENSITY

A local conflict of high intensity resulted in casualties from clashes and terrorist attacks.

Negotiations Between Parties

Attempts at negotiations between the government and Ambazonia separatists began in late 2020-early 2021 but have been unsuccessful so far.



Impact on Global Processes

In recent years, the Cameroonian government has leaned towards Moscow. However, Russian influence faced challenges at the end of 2022. President Paul Biya is increasing contacts with the United States, possibly due to the separatists' intentions in the western part of the country (Ambazonia region) to seek Wagner Group assistance. Local journalist Remy Ngono's sources indicate this. According to The Africa Report's investigation, Cameroon, alongside the neighboring Central African Republic, has become a center for the Wagner Group's economic activities. This includes the gold-rich Ndasima mine in the CAR, with gold ingots discreetly sent to Russia through the Cameroonian port of Douala.

Casualties

Over the course of the conflict, more than 1,600 government soldiers and up to 2,500 rebels have died.

Forecast

The prolonged conflict weakens the country, creating conditions for the increased activities of both Islamists and Russian mercenaries. With little progress in conflict resolution, the forecast suggests the continuation of the current situation and an intensification of terrorist threats.

LOCAL CONFLICTS

Western Sahara



EVENTS, INCIDENTS

The conflict in the region, which began on November 13, 2020, around the border crossing and road near the town of Al-Karkarat, continues in 2023 with mutual shelling and attacks on positions.

Impact on Global Processes

The conflict in Western Sahara is part of the rivalry between Morocco and Algeria and could potentially become a new component of the proxy war between Israel and Iran. On July 17, 2023, it became known about a letter from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to King Mohammed VI of Morocco, recognizing Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara. In June and August 2023, information emerged about Morocco receiving Israeli suicide drones SpyX and Israeli-Indian SAM Barak MX.

On November 2, 2023, the Algerian parliament granted President Abdelmadjid Tebboune the right to go to war against Israel in the Gaza Strip and provide support.

In November 2023, it was reported that Polisario received Iranian anti-aircraft missiles and drones of unnamed types. Currently, Morocco continues to arm its forces, considering the constant threat from Algeria, as well as taking into account the strengthening of Iran's influence on Polisario. The influence of Iran on Algeria and Polisario is being formalized.

Trends

Morocco continues its course of isolating Polisario and narrowing international recognition of the «Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic.» At the same time, Rabat works to expand support for sovereignty over Western Sahara. A significant event in 2023 in this context was Israel's recognition of Morocco's rights to the aforementioned territory. Morocco consistently avoids any direct contact with Polisario.

In turn, Polisario continues to avoid direct large-scale clashes with Moroccan forces, resorting to terrorist attacks and targeted strikes. The organization continues to orient itself toward Algeria and falls under Iranian influence. Meanwhile, militants obstruct the work of the UN mission to conduct a referendum in Western Sahara. From a formal-legal perspective, Polisario fights for international subjectivity.

INTENSITY

Low-intensity local conflict.

Negotiations Between Parties

On September 8, 2023, for the first time since his appointment in 2021, the UN Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, Staffan de Mistura, visited the Moroccan-controlled part of Western Sahara. On September 11, Morocco accepted assistance from Algeria to deal with the aftermath of an earthquake. This was the first time since 2021 that Algeria opened its airspace to Morocco for the operational delivery of humanitarian aid. On September 27, 2023, representatives of Morocco and Algeria at the UN engaged in a dispute. Algeria continues to advocate for a referendum, while Rabat emphasizes that Western Sahara is its territory. On October 31, 2023, the UN Security Council extended the mandate of the mission to conduct a referendum in Western Sahara for one year (Russia and Mozambique abstained).



Casualties

- 5 Polisario fighters were killed, including Abba Ali Hamudi, «commander of the sixth military district.»;
- 2 killed Moroccan civilians, three injured.;
- 3 killed Mauritanian civilians (gold prospectors).

Forecast

Morocco continues to arm its armed forces, gradually shifting from the Turkish market to the Israeli one. Rabat takes into account the situation in the world and possible risks, avoiding a forceful resolution of the conflict. Its position is that sovereignty over Western Sahara is a settled matter, and only the issue of regional autonomy can be discussed. In contrast, Polisario will try to play on the contradictions between Morocco and Algeria, while increasingly relying on Iranian assistance. In the medium-term perspective, the use of Iranian weapons against Moroccan forces is quite likely.

LOCAL CONFLICTS

Western Papua (Indonesia)

EVENTS, INCIDENTS

Throughout 2023, the National Liberation Army of Western Papua (NLAWP) carried out a series of attacks against the Indonesian National Army and the Indonesian National Police.



Trends

In 2023, NLAWP expanded its series of attacks, aiming to displace Indonesian migrants from ethnic Papuan territories. The organization particularly emphasizes terrorist attacks and measures. Currently, militants continue to hold hostage New Zealand pilot Philip Mertens, captured in February 2023.

After 2021, since the narrowing of the region's special autonomy, Indonesia refers to NLAWP as a «separatist terrorist group» and increases military and police presence in Western Papua while facilitating the relocation of Indonesians there.



Impact on Global Processes

The conflict is not internationalized by its nature. Currently, there is no clearly defined side supporting NLAWP. Indonesia insists on the internal nature of the conflict since the global community recognizes Western Papua as its territory. Conversely, NLAWP seeks to internationalize it and garner external support. For example, NLAWP openly sympathizes with Russia and supports its aggression against Ukraine. The captured New Zealand pilot, Philip Mertens, is being used as leverage to pressure Western states to influence Jakarta's position. Simultaneously, this diminishes the already limited international support for the independence of Western Papua.

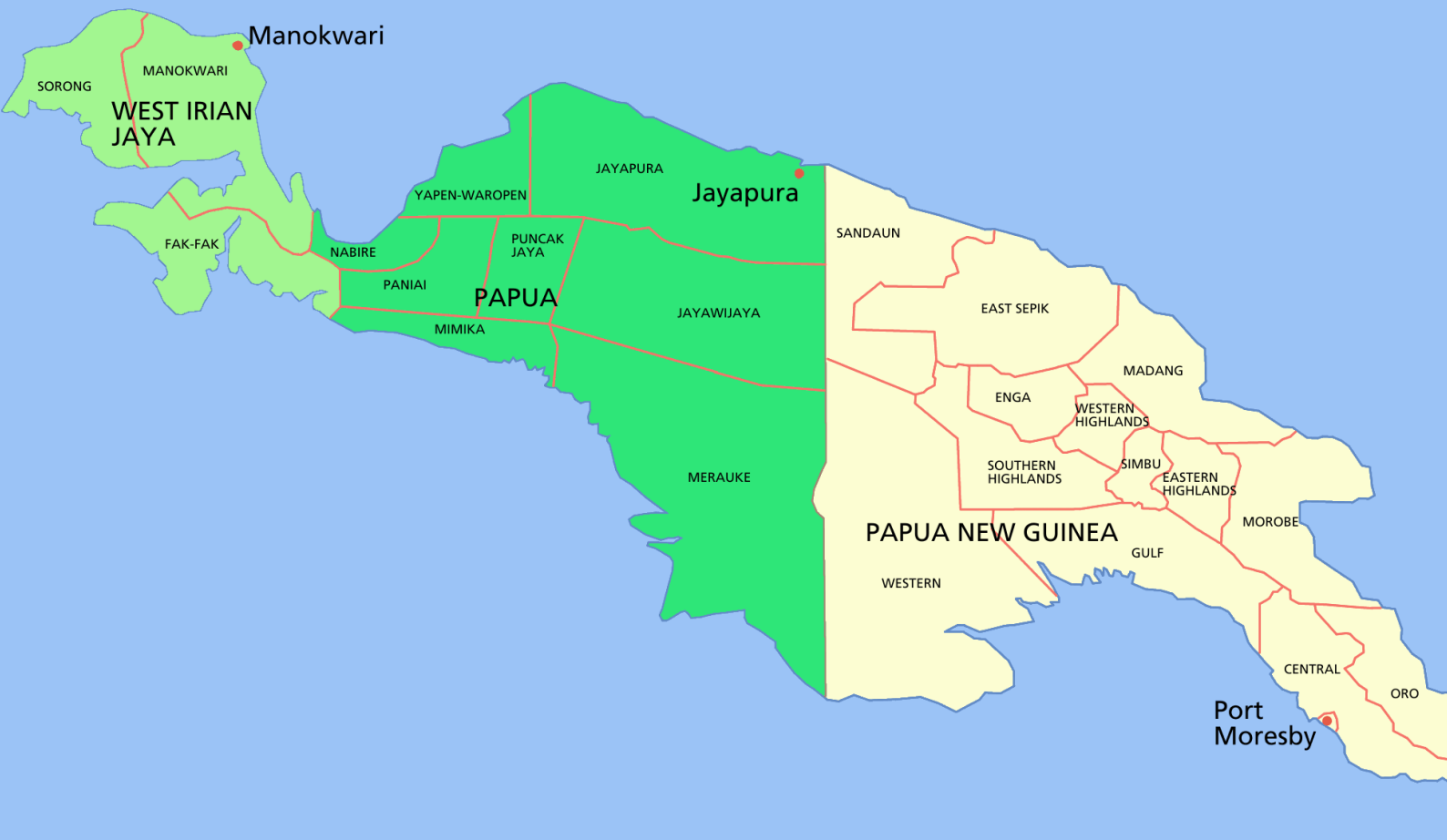


Casualties

- 24 NLAWP militants killed, 9 captured, 7 arrested.;
- 19 Indonesian military personnel and 3 police officers were killed.;
- 19 civilians were killed, 24 injured.;
- 512 internally displaced persons.

INTENSITY

Low-intensity local conflict.



Forecast



NLAWP will continue raids on the residences of Indonesian migrants, markets, police stations, and local government offices. The killing of the captured New Zealand pilot and the abduction of new foreign hostages for publicity and the popularization of the Papuan issue on the international stage cannot be ruled out. Concurrently, NLAWP will seek third-party support in the struggle against Indonesia. Indonesia will try not to escalate the conflict, as it would require the involvement and further deployment of more police and military forces with corresponding resource costs. At the same time, Jakarta will focus on preventing NLAWP from capturing foreign hostages to avoid reputational risks.

Military Coup

Niger



EVENTS, INCIDENTS

On July 26, 2023, soldiers of the presidential guard of Niger arrested President Mohamed Bazoum, while another group of soldiers announced his overthrow, closed the country's borders, suspended the operation of state institutions, imposed a curfew, and simultaneously declared the formation of a junta. The head of the presidential guard, Chiani, declared himself the new leader of the country. In Niamey, the capital, rallies in support of the junta were held, with people waving Russian flags.

In response to the coup, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) imposed sanctions on the junta that seized power and issued an ultimatum: 7 days for the return of power to President Bazoum or face military intervention. The deadline expired on August 6, but intervention did not occur, and peaceful negotiations became the primary instrument for resolving the situation.

Impact on Global Processes

The coup in Niger led to a change in its foreign policy orientation. Under President Mohamed Bazoum, Niger was a reliable partner for the United States and France, both economically (uranium extracted in Niger covered 15% of France's needs and a fifth of the EU's) and in security (the country hosted a French military contingent, and there were U.S. bases). Additionally, Niger was a participant in the Crimean Platform and voted in support of Ukraine at the UN.

After the coup, relations with France were «frozen»: the French ambassador was recalled, and as of December 2023, France is withdrawing its military contingent from the country. In December, Niger terminated the military agreement with the EU and announced its withdrawal from the G5 Sahel Counterterrorism Forces. Instead, in December, Russia's Deputy Defense Minister Yunus-Bek Yevkurov signed a military cooperation agreement with Niger's defense minister. In September, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso agreed to create a defense alliance.

Simultaneously, two U.S. military bases continue to operate, and a new ambassador has been appointed to the country. After the coup, the U.S. initially suspended military cooperation with Niger, but during a visit to Niger, Mary Catherine Phee, the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, announced plans to resume this cooperation. This can be related to the fact that the U.S. does not want to strengthen Russian positions in the Sahel and avoids involving the Wagner Group in Niger.

INTENSITY

Military coup.

Negotiations Between Parties

Currently, there are no agreements on a transitional period after which power would transfer to civilians. ECOWAS seeks the release of President Bazoum and the establishment of the shortest terms for the transfer of power to civilians. The Niger junta proposes a 36-month transitional period. ECOWAS has formed a committee with the presidents of Togo, Sierra Leone, and Benin to negotiate with the Niger junta. Algeria, with a sufficiently pro-Russian government, acted as a mediator in the negotiations.



Forecast

Niger suffers from jihadist terrorist attacks, and the country cannot ensure its security independently, requiring external assistance. It can be predicted that Russia, sensing a security vacuum in Niger, will attempt to negotiate closer cooperation and involve the Wagner Group in the country. Mercenaries are already active in Mali, and there are suspicions of their involvement in Burkina Faso. Therefore, under the condition of Niger fully transitioning into the orbit of Russian political influence, Moscow's position in the Sahel will significantly strengthen.



Military Coup

Gabon

EVENTS, INCIDENTS

On August 26, 2023, elections were held in Gabon, and Ali Bongo was re-elected. The Bongo dynasty has been in power in the country since 1967. The election results sparked dissatisfaction, with the opposition claiming that its candidate, Albert Ondo Ossa, was the legitimate winner, and that the elections were accompanied by falsifications.

As a result, on August 30, 2023, military personnel of the Armed Forces announced the seizure of power in Gabon. The country's president, Ali Bongo, was detained and placed under house arrest.

On the same day, the Gabonese junta-appointed General Brice Oligny Ngema as the leader during the military coup, and on September 5, he took the oath as the president of the country. Brice Oligny Ngema previously held the position of the head of the Republican Guard of the country. Additionally, he is a relative of Omar Bongo Ondimba, the former president of the country and the father of Ali Bongo. Therefore, this coup can be classified as a «palace coup.»

Negotiations Between Parties

On November 13, the military government announced that elections in the country would take place in August 2025, and the exact schedule and dates would be confirmed at a national conference scheduled for April 2024.

INTENSITY

Military coup.



Impact on Global Processes

In October 2023, the United States officially recognized that a coup had taken place in Gabon and suspended part of its financial aid. Additionally, Gabon's membership in the Economic Community of Central African States was suspended.

However, Gabon has not yet witnessed a significant change in its previous foreign policy course, unlike Niger.

Forecast

Gabon remains in the orbit of French influence for now. However, the presence of the junta creates challenges for the country's development, even considering the fact that a façade democracy operated in the country before.

Terrorism

Philippines

EVENTS, INCIDENTS

On December 3, 2023, a terrorist attack occurred at the Mindanao University in the city of Marawi in the southern part of the country. The Islamic State claimed responsibility.

Casualties

The explosion resulted in 4 fatalities and 72 injuries.

Trends

In recent years, the Philippine government has managed to minimize the activities of Islamists. The government declared the complete clearance of the Sulu province from the terrorist group Abu Sayyaf, a partner of the Islamic State. However, the local Muslim population continues to sympathize with jihadists.

INTENSITY

Terrorist attack.

Forecast

The escalation of conflict in the southern Philippines threatens economic weakening and a decrease in the geopolitical significance of the Philippines as a U.S. ally. It could strengthen China's position in the region.

Internal Political Crisis



Iraq

EVENTS, INCIDENTS

A year has passed since the Iraqi parliament approved a new cabinet headed by Prime Minister Mohammed al-Sudani, putting an end to the political deadlock that engulfed the country after the parliamentary elections in October 2021. The new government implemented a program focused on combating corruption, addressing unemployment, supporting vulnerable and low-income population groups, reforming the economic and financial sectors, and improving public services.

Discussions continue regarding the distribution of oil revenues between the federal government and Iraqi Kurdistan. On March 23, the International Chamber of Commerce ruled that oil exports from Iraqi Kurdistan to Turkey without Baghdad's official approval violated the 1973 agreement between Iraq and Turkey, leading Turkey to halt these oil flows, which constitute about 0.5% of global supplies. Later, Baghdad and Erbil reached a temporary agreement to resume exports, with Iraqi Kurdistan allowing federal oversight of its oil

revenues in exchange for a share of the recently adopted federal budget.

However, despite this agreement, Turkey did not resume the operation of the oil pipeline for an extended period. Estimates suggest that the prolonged shutdown cost Iraqi Kurdistan \$4 billion in lost export revenue, making the region increasingly dependent on payments from the federal government. After protests in the Iraqi Kurdistan region over non-payment of salaries to public servants, the federal government announced in September that it would pay an additional \$1.6 billion annually to the region.

Regarding security, the latest semi-annual report by the Secretary-General on the threat to international peace and security from ISIS as of July 31 noted that the group maintains a presence in the region, with 5,000 fighters in Iraq and 7,000 in Syria, despite prolonged counter-terrorism operations. According to the report, the anti-terrorism efforts of Iraqi forces continued to reduce ISIS

activity, but the group retained a low level of insurgents, exploiting security gaps along the Kurdistan region's border for attacks and replenishing supplies. ISIS cells maintain a presence mainly in desert and mountainous areas.

Additionally, ethnic violence involving Kurds, Arabs, and Turkmen erupted in the northern city of Kirkuk at the end of August. The unrest occurred after the federal government announced it would return a building to the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), the largest party in the region, which served as the party's headquarters but was occupied by the federal government after the capture of Kirkuk in 2017. On August 28, Arabs and Turkmen protested near the building, seeking to prevent the return of the KDP building and the resumption of party activities in the city. Clashes occurred with Kurdish protesters, leading to the deployment of Iraqi security forces. During the unrest, four Kurds were killed, and two Iraqi security officers were injured.

In Iraq's bilateral relations with neighboring countries, security-

Humanitarian Consequences

related events also took place. After a series of Iranian airstrikes in September and November 2022 against Kurdish-Iranian opposition groups in Iraqi Kurdistan, Iran, and Iraq in March announced a border security agreement aimed at protecting the shared borders between the two countries and consolidating cooperation in several security areas. In September, as part of the agreement, Iraq began disarming and relocating Kurdish-Iranian groups from the Kurdistan region to refugee camps further from the border.

Turkey continues periodic military operations against Kurdish targets in Iraq. On September 18, Turkey carried out a drone attack on the Arbat airport, killing three Kurdish terrorists. The next day, Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid issued a statement condemning Turkey's repeated attacks on Iraqi territory.

In December, Turkey launched a military operation in northern Iraq against the Kurdistan Workers' Party after the death of 12 of its soldiers.

As of 2023, Iraq has around 1.14 million internally displaced persons and 25 camps for displaced persons, serving as temporary shelter for 175,000 people in the Kurdistan region of Iraq.

Casualties

Several hundred soldiers and terrorists, and around 200 civilians, lost their lives.

Impact on Global Processes

On May 30, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2682, extending the mandate of UNAMI for another year. On September 15, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2697, renewing for one year the mandate of the UN Investigative Team for Accountability of Crimes Committed by ISIS.

Russia's influence in Iraq is growing. In particular, Lukoil has gained complete control over the Eridu oil field, the largest discovered in Iraq in the past 20 years.

Forecast

The situation in Iraq will traditionally remain tense. Currently, Iraq can be defined as a fragile state or a failed state. Significant influence on the country's internal politics will be exerted by regional and global actors, including Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, and the United States, intensifying centrifugal tendencies in the state.

INTENSITY

Internal political crisis.

Internal Political Crisis

I r a n

EVENTS, INCIDENTS

Protests that began last year continue in the country. Although their intensity has decreased, clashes with the police and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps are regular in the capital and regions. Iran has been involved in a series of proxy conflicts for many years: the civil war in Lebanon, instability in Iraq, the civil war in Syria, the war in Yemen, and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. At the same time, official Tehran has not only refrained from starting any major wars but has also avoided direct clashes with any of the parties involved over these years. Among Iran's interests is the promotion of militarized radicalism among Palestinians in the West Bank

and East Jerusalem through support for Hamas. This aims to further restrain attacks by Israeli settlers on local Arabs, marginalizing the Palestinian Authority's power. Iran also seeks to incite uprisings in other Palestinian territories, destabilizing the situation and threatening to open other «fronts.» By supporting Palestinians, Iran aims to gain a moral and political advantage over the West among non-Western nations, attempting to consolidate the global South.

Iran has increased the production of highly enriched uranium to 60% purity, close to the level used for nuclear weapons. Iran already has enough uranium enriched to 60%

to create three nuclear bombs, and with further enrichment, according to the IAEA's theoretical definition, it will have an even greater quantity at lower enrichment levels. At the same time, Iran denies any intention to develop nuclear weapons. Iran enriches uranium to 60% (approaching about 90%, necessary for weapon production) at its pilot fuel enrichment plant in the branching complex in Natanz and at the Fordo plant.

Iran steadfastly refuses to negotiate its nuclear program. A major war is an absolutely unacceptable scenario for Iran. Therefore, Iran seeks to avoid direct confrontation with Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United States, although indirect proxy wars with these states continue. Iran's support for the terrorist group Hamas in the attack on Israel in the fall of 2023 aims not to inflict such damage on Israel that would deter it from similar attacks against Palestinians in the future.



Impact on Global Processes

Iran has emerged as one of the main allies of Russia in the war against Ukraine. Iranian drones are becoming an increasingly important weapon for Russia in its war in Ukraine, where they are used to strike a range of civilian and military targets. Iran continues to supply UAVs and ammunition to Russia and is negotiating the supply of ballistic missiles

to the Kremlin. In return, Iran receives Russian Su-35 fighters and Mi-28 helicopters. Iran and Russia have signed an agreement whereby the pro-Iranian organization Hezbollah will transfer its old weapons to Syria and the Russian army, receiving new weapons from Iran.

Casualties

Thousands were injured, over 550 protesters were killed (including over 70 minors), and over 20,000 were arrested.

INTENSITY

Internal political crisis, involvement in regional conflicts.



Internal Political Crisis Latin America

EVENTS, INCIDENTS

In 2023, Latin America continued to be a region with a high level of socio-economic instability. The region lacks political consistency; often, after each round of elections, ideological opposites of former leaders come to power, seeking to nullify the achievements of their predecessors.

This happened in **Argentina**, where at the end of the year, the presidential elections were won by Javier Milei: a radical libertarian and anarcho-capitalist who plans to implement a series of unconventional reforms, including closing certain ministries and the central bank, as well as replacing the national currency peso with the US dollar. His victory took place against the backdrop of a serious economic crisis: prices in the country are rising rapidly (inflation over 100%), and unemployment has reached 20%. It was the economic problems that led to the defeat of Sergio Massa, a representative of the Peronists who have influenced Argentine governance since 1946.

In unstable **Venezuela**, 2023 marked a year of relative stabilization. The country managed to curb high inflation and reduce the threat of famine. In January, the border with Colombia was opened, allowing the resumption of humanitarian aid.

Also, in January, the opposition government of Juan Guaidó, which did not receive enough international support for a serious confrontation with Nicolás Maduro, was dissolved. The new leader of the opposition became María Corina Machado, who won in the primaries in October. In March, a high-profile arrest of the 21st Venezuelan official took place in the corruption case in the oil and crypto business.

In **Colombia**, the government managed to negotiate a ceasefire with the National Liberation Army, an anti-government terrorist group with about 2,500 fighters. Throughout the year, several terrorist attacks occurred, including car bombings near government buildings. Socialist President Gustavo Petro condemned Israel's response to Hamas's terrorist actions in October, after which the Israeli ambassador was expelled from the country.

A massive political crisis enveloped **Peru**. In December 2022, President Pedro Castillo attempted to organize a coup by dissolving the Congress, which was about to express distrust in him. However, Castillo was arrested, and the powers of the head of state passed to Vice President Dina Boluarte. As a result, protests erupted, which were suppressed by the army,

and a state of emergency was declared. By the end of winter, several clashes occurred, resulting in dozens of deaths and hundreds injured. Particularly bloody events took place in the city of Huallaga, where the police opened fire on protesters in January (18 killed, over 100 injured). In April, a vote of no confidence in Dina Boluarte failed, and protests continue to this day.

In **Brazil**, at the beginning of 2023, supporters of former President Jair Bolsonaro attacked the Supreme Court and the National Congress building, leading to mass arrests and purges in law enforcement agencies.

The crisis continues on the border between **Mexico** and the United States. In 2023, over 200,000 illegal immigrants attempted to enter US territory every month. The UN documented over a thousand deaths.



Casualties

Dozens were killed, and hundreds were injured during protests. Dozens affected by terrorist attacks in Colombia. Hundreds of migrant deaths from Central America attempting to reach the US.

Impact on Global Processes

Latin America has noticeably fallen out of the sphere of US interests under the leadership of the Joe Biden administration. The region is becoming a sphere of influence for China, which establishes cooperation with national governments through cheap credits. In previous years, Brazil, Argentina, and other major economies moved closer to China and Russia, but the new Argentine leader has already declared the inadmissibility of cooperation with dictatorial regimes.

Humanitarian Consequences

Hundreds of thousands of citizens from Caribbean basin countries try to enter the US every month, creating a humanitarian catastrophe in neighboring Mexico and in southern US states. Protests in Peru cause billions in damages due to infrastructure destruction, and private and state property.

The economic crisis in Argentina pushes thousands of citizens into poverty.

Trends

Outbursts of socio-economic instability are characteristic of almost all countries in Latin America. In 2022, there were no major conservative-led states left in the region, but in 2023, Argentina elected an economically conservative leader.



INTENSITY

Internal political crisis, the threat of escalation to civil war.

Forecast

Socialist governments will continue to hinder the region's development, making it more vulnerable to external influences. Economic troubles will be the cause of a new wave of protests in 2024.

Internal Political Crisis

Sierra Leone



EVENTS, INCIDENTS

On November 26, in the capital of Sierra Leone, Freetown, a group of military personnel attacked several objects, attempted to seize a weapons depot near the presidential residence, and attacked two prisons. This marks the second attempt at a coup in Sierra Leone in 2023. Previous events occurred at the end of July (around the same time as the coup in Nigeria): a group of individuals planning to seize power in the country was arrested then, with plans to execute the takeover in the first half of August.

These coup attempts take place against the backdrop of political tension in the country. In July, Julius Maada Bio was re-elected president after the first round of elections. The main opposition party in the country, the All People’s Congress (APC), disagreed with the results and boycotted parliamentary sessions until October, even despite the threat of the suspension of financial aid from the U.S. Parliament’s work was unblocked after three days of talks and commitments to review the elections. However, nothing was done.

Impact on Global Processes

Since 2020, coups have become quite common in Africa (Sudan, Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso, Gabon, Niger). The frequency and lack of significant consequences (except for sanctions and the suspension of financial aid) encourage military personnel in other African countries to consider a shift in power. This is particularly relevant for economically weak states facing security risks.

Casualties

At least 19 people died as a result, 13 military personnel and one civilian were arrested. According to the country’s authorities, the coup attempt was organized by the military associated with former President Ernest Bai Koroma of the opposition party All People’s Congress (APC). APC rejects such accusations.

INTENSITY

Political instability attempts at military coups.

Forecast

Considering poverty, the level of dissatisfaction among the population, and the conflict between the government and the opposition, it can be anticipated that further instability in this country will persist.

Thailand

EVENTS, INCIDENTS

Throughout 2023, Malay separatists carried out a series of attacks on military posts, police stations, and civilian objects in the provinces of Yala, Narathiwat, and Pattani. The most notable were the terrorist acts on January 21 (shootout in the jungles of Narathiwat province), April 14 (series of explosions and attacks on railways), May 12, July 29 (explosion at a fireworks depot), October 21 (explosion near a jewelry store and an attack on a checkpoint). In total, over 100 coordinated incidents were recorded during the year.

Trends

It is expected that peace talks between Bangkok and BRN will resume in January 2024. However, among BRN factions, there are different approaches to the overall feasibility of communication with the Thai government. It is also worth noting that other Malay separatist organizations are not represented in the negotiating process, and drug cartels, oil smugglers, and pirates are generally not interested in ending the conflict. Therefore, major breakthroughs in communication between Bangkok and BRN are not expected at the moment. At the same time, an escalation of the conflict is unlikely.

Negotiations Between Parties

At the beginning of 2023, negotiations between official Bangkok and BRN (Barisan Revolusi Nasional – the most powerful separatist organization of Thai Malays) completely ceased at the initiative of the latter. The reason was the unwillingness to communicate with the de facto military government that had been in control since 2014 and the anticipation of new parliamentary elections, which took place on May 14, 2023.

On August 28, after several days of forming a civilian government led by Setthayo Taweessin, Malay separatists began a series of coordinated attacks on military and police units.

On November 27, Settho Taweessin appointed the first civilian head of the negotiating team with Malay separatists in a long time – Chatichai Bangchud.

Casualties

- 4 Thai military and police personnel were killed, 4 injured.;
- 12 civilians were killed and 100 injured.;
- 3 militants killed.

INTENSITY

Low-intensity local conflict.



Impact on Global Processes

The conflict, ongoing since 2004, primarily affects relations between Thailand and Malaysia. The latter facilitates negotiations between Bangkok and separatists. However, it should be considered that separatists in the southern provinces of Thailand have Malay origins (depending on the province, Malays make up 72% to 87% of the population). Periodically, thoughts emerge in Thai politics about the possible benefits for Malaysia in supporting local separatists. In addition to the ethnic aspect, this conflict has a religious basis. Thais are Buddhists, while Malays are Muslims. Accordingly, the struggle of Malay separatists against Bangkok evokes sympathy from the Muslim population of Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and a number of other countries worldwide. One of the parties to the conflict includes local drug cartels, oil smugglers, and pirates. Despite the fact that these groups did not make themselves known in the public space in 2023, they continue to influence the economic situation in the region.

Forecast

The most likely scenario is the continuation of peaceful negotiations without achieving specific sustainable results. A ceasefire agreement similar to the one that took place in 2021 should not be ruled out.

Internal Political Crisis The Balkans

EVENTS, INCIDENTS



Bosnia and Herzegovina

throughout 2023, was another triggering country in the Balkan region, from where hybrid Russian influences spread to neighboring countries. The main transmitter of these influences is the entity Republic of Srpska, once again led by Milorad Dodik since October 2022.

Similar to his previous tenures as the president of the Republic of Srpska or as a member of the Presidency representing Bosnian Serbs, Dodik continued to destabilize the situation within the country. Dodik emphasized that the Republic of Srpska should become independent. This local separatism has open support from the Russian leadership, which calls on the EU, the U.S., and the EU-UN High Representative in BiH to return to the original version of the Dayton Peace Accords signed in November 1995 at the U.S. military base. According to this document, the separatist state formation of Bosnian Serbs,

created during the initial phases of the Yugoslav Federation's disintegration and legalized through the signing of the Dayton Agreement, was granted more autonomy in internal affairs and its own armed forces. After some reforms in the early 2000s, the Army of the Republic of Srpska became part of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and some of the entity's powers shifted to the federal level.

In the last two years, Milorad Dodik has taken many steps to make the Republic of Srpska not subject to either the EU-UN High Representative or the federal government in Sarajevo. For example, at the end of 2021, the entity's Assembly adopted a decision for representatives of Bosnian Serbs to withdraw from the legal and judicial systems of BiH, as well as from the country's armed forces and security services. This year, the Assembly and Dodik annulled the jurisdiction of the Constitutional Court of BiH in the territory of the

Republic of Srpska. Instead, the leadership of the entity demands the development of a law on the Constitutional Court that would apply to the entire country. Dodik called on a Serbian judge, who is among the members of the highest judicial institution in the state, to resign. The Republic of Srpska was supposed to nominate another candidate for the Constitutional Court due to the judges' quota, but this has not been done.

Another step in escalating the political crisis in BiH was the decision of the Republic of Srpska's parliament not to publish in the official gazette the decisions of the EU-UN High Representative. Dodik does not recognize the activities of the international representative and his office, demanding that the EU and the UN revoke the mandate of the current High Representative, Christian Schmidt. His decisions are not enforced in the territory of the Republic of Srpska, leading to the collapse of all systems in BiH.

The crisis is constantly deepening because in 2023, Dodik several times threatened to withdraw Serbian representatives from the State Prosecutor's Office, the police, the judiciary, and several ministries, which could effectively block the functioning of all institutions in the country. As a result, there is an increase in social tension, deepening crisis phenomena, and blocking Euro-Atlantic processes.

In 2024, Dodik may attempt to move from threats to concrete actions regarding holding a referendum on secession from BiH and further unification with Serbia, but the realization of such actions is unlikely. Starting from 2006, when Dodik became the Prime Minister of the Republic of Srpska for the second time, he regularly emphasized the need to free Bosnia and Herzegovina from international oversight. The EU and the UN are against such decisions, so the position of the EU-UN High Representative continues to exist. Every time, Milorad Dodik emphasizes that, in case his demands are not met, he will initiate a popular plebiscite on various issues - sovereignty, returning to the Dayton Peace Accords of 1995, eliminating the position of the High Representative, the State Court, and its powers, and so on.

The threat of such statements

by the current president of the Republic of Srpska is that they find resonance among Bosnian Serbs in Serbia and Russia. Each supporting party emphasizes the importance of adhering to the Dayton Peace Accords and the rights of the entity's population to self-determination. Moscow uses the instability of the Republic of Srpska and BiH to spread hybrid influences, strengthen its presence in the country, and consolidate itself. The formation of another pro-Russian platform in the region will jeopardize the Eurointegration of Western Balkan countries, which have candidate status for EU accession. It is extremely disadvantageous for Russia to have EU expansion occur at the expense of the entry of Albania, BiH, Serbia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Kosovo (potentially).

High representatives of the Republic of Srpska, Milorad Dodik and Željka Cvijanović, have long been under sanctions from the United States and the United Kingdom. In addition, family members of Milorad Dodik and a number of officials from the Republic of Srpska have been included in the sanctions list of the United States.

Montenegro

For Montenegro, the year 2023 was characterized by a significant reformatting of the domestic

political scene and the final defeat and transition to the «silent» opposition of the once-dominant Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) and its longtime leader, Milo Djukanovic. Moreover, Milo Djukanovic himself completely withdrew from political life this year. Instead, Montenegro's political arena became more pluralistic, but there was a notable rise of declaratively pro-Western and pro-Serbian forces with varying levels of radicalism, including overt Russophiles from the «For the Future of Montenegro» coalition.

The trend of polarization in Montenegrin society observed in previous years, dividing it into two antagonistic camps (pro-Russian/pro-Serbian and pro-Western/patriotic Montenegrin), further deepened. Currently, the advantage is more pronounced on the side of the former camp.

It is worth noting that a significant role in this was played by the radical strengthening of the Serbian Orthodox Church – the largest denomination in Montenegro, which simultaneously serves as the main and most effective conduit for Russian «soft power» and ideas of Greater Serbian nationalism (which, among other things, denies the existence of a separate Montenegrin nation, considering it a «communist surrogate»).

Parallel to the strengthening

of the influence of pro-Serbian/pro-Russian forces in Montenegro's political life (including holding power in many municipalities and the position of the parliament speaker), the country's Eurointegration agenda is being actualized. According to recent sociological surveys, the level of public support for Montenegro's EU accession fluctuates at around 78-80%.

Overall, in 2023, Montenegro, from a political and institutional perspective, marked a gradual stabilization, exit from a prolonged crisis spiral, and the formation of stable bodies of state power in a full mandate.

Key events in Montenegro's domestic political life in 2023 included:

- Presidential elections in two rounds (March-April 2023), where Milo Djukanovic suffered defeat from the young, declaratively pro-European and latent pro-Serbian Jakov Milatovic (one of the leaders of the «Europe Now» movement).
- Early parliamentary elections (June 11, 2023), resulted in a significant renewal of the parliamentary composition and the distribution of political forces in the country. The «Europe Now» movement achieved the most success in the elections, and the DPS finally entrenched itself in the opposition.
- Formation of the 44th

Government of Montenegro on October 31, 2023, led by Milojko Spajic (one of the leaders of the «Europe Now» movement), whose key goal is to qualitatively accelerate the country's Eurointegration, judicial reform, strengthen the rule of law, and improve citizens' well-being (a social-economic program «Europe Now 2.0» is being developed). The government of M. Spajic declares a clear commitment to the country's pro-Western foreign policy course, with the first practical step for advancing the negotiation process with the EU being the closure of Chapters 23 and 24 by mid-2024, which relate to human rights and the judiciary (through long-awaited appointments in the judiciary). Given the above, expectations for the actions of the Spajic government in the next year are extremely high, creating additional pressure on its work.

- Restoration of the full functionality of the Constitutional Court (as of November 2023, all 7 members of this fundamentally important state institution were elected).
- Extensive investigations into the involvement of former high-ranking police officials of Montenegro in organized crime and their connections with the drug mafia.

INTENSITY

Internal political crisis.

- Election to the position of the parliament (Skupstina) speaker of Montenegro of an overt Russophile and Greater Serbian nationalist, Andrija Mandic (October 30, 2023), who was previously a suspect in the case of the attempted coup in Montenegro in October 2016 (currently, he is under a sort of informal isolation from Western diplomats). In exchange for this appointment, the pro-Russian coalition «For the Future of Montenegro» provided support for the formation of the 44th Government of the country.

- Conducting a population census (the last one was in 2011), the results of which are expected at the end of December or the beginning of January. The process of preparing for the census was accompanied by significant controversies, including concerns from the pro-Western part of society that the Serbian Orthodox Church and pro-Serbian forces, with the support of official Belgrade, would use this census to artificially inflate the number of citizens of Montenegro who identify themselves as Serbs.



Trends

For many years, Moscow has been trying to slow down and freeze the process of European expansion in the Western Balkans, using the Republic of Srpska, which is against joining the EU and NATO, and Serbia, which is negotiating accession but is doing so only for appearances and to meet its own economic and financial needs. Considering that Milorad Dodik is always ready to meet with Russian leadership, particularly with Sergey Lavrov and Vladimir Putin, it is more advantageous for the Kremlin to focus on destabilizing the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) through the Republic of Srpska. Events in Montenegro indirectly indicate an increasingly active role of anti-European forces, mainly coordinated from Belgrade, after several years of hesitation and expectations that Montenegro would move towards greater integration with Serbia (and thus, closer to Russia). All this is happening against the backdrop of the general intensification of Russia's destructive and destabilizing activities in the Western Balkans.



Impact on Global Processes

For Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina is important not only as another platform for the spread of Russian propaganda and as an unstable country that attracts the attention of Western politicians. Both BiH and Ukraine already have candidate status for EU accession. Ukraine is preparing to open accession negotiations, and

Bosnia and Herzegovina has been promised such an opportunity, provided that by March 2024, the European Commission submits a report on the Balkan country's compliance with the necessary conditions to start the accession negotiation process. This moment, as well as granting candidate status to Ukraine half a year earlier than to Bosnia and Herzegovina, has caused concern in expert circles in BiH. There, as in Austria, which advocates for BiH's fastest accession to the European Union, dissatisfaction with Brussels' policy has spread. In BiH and Austria, it is believed that Ukraine is being given an easier path to accession, while Sarajevo is required to fully commit to the preparation for accession. Similar sentiments against Ukraine can be exploited by Russian propaganda, shaping a negative image of Ukraine in BiH's society and laying the groundwork for further negative perceptions of our country's accession to the European Union. Milorad Dodik and other high-ranking officials from the Republic of Srpska will support this, along with Serbia. Montenegro currently remains committed to its previous Euro-Atlantic course, and the foreign policy of this Balkan state is 100% aligned with the EU's common line, especially in the area of anti-Russian sanctions (Montenegro has adopted and implemented all 11 packages of sanctions against Russia as an aggressor state). Starting from February 24, 2022, Montenegro has provided significant political, humanitarian, financial, and military-technical assistance, and has accepted one of the largest percentages of internally displaced persons from Ukraine seeking refuge from Russian armed aggression. However, Russia is attempting to distort the situation.



Forecast

Bosnia and Herzegovina will remain one of the most problematic centers in the Balkan region, where Russia will simultaneously pursue several of its own objectives. Firstly, supporting the separatism of the Republic of Srpska and the president's desire to secede from BiH. Secondly, increasing Russian presence and propaganda. Thirdly, distorting the idea of Eurointegration for BiH to maintain destabilization and amplify crises in the country, negatively affecting various aspects of public life. However, an open armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina is unlikely. In recent years, Russia has found it more important to support hybrid intervention and presence rather than provide assistance in an open war.

Therefore, Ukraine should carefully monitor events in this Balkan country, the destabilization of which Russia has been seeking for the past few years. Putin and his entourage are trying to distract the attention of Ukraine's Western partners from Russian aggression and involve them more in the internal problems of BiH. However, a complete shift of attention from the EU, the US, and the UK from Ukraine to Bosnia and Herzegovina is not to be expected. Brussels, Washington, and London timely reacted to the growing tension and the strengthening of Milorad Dodik's separatism.

The decision made in 2022 to increase the number of EUFOR peacekeepers (EU Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina) is a preventive mechanism through which the United States, the EU, and Britain manage to control internal Bosnian problems and prevent them from becoming a broader Balkan issue. In this context, it is worth noting the decision of the German Bundestag to resume the participation of German military personnel in the EU peacekeeping mission, from which Germany withdrew in 2012.

As for Montenegro, the country has undergone profound changes in its political scene in recent years. The formation of the 44th Government of Montenegro with the support of the pro-Russian coalition and the election of A. Mandić as the parliament speaker may further exacerbate internal antagonisms in the country and harm its further European path. Additionally, the arrival of an openly pro-Russian politician in the position of the parliament speaker of Montenegro signifies an obvious failure of the efforts of Western partners, especially the United States, to prevent aggressive and radical pro-Russian elements from taking higher state positions in Montenegro. All this creates a real risk of Montenegro falling into the sphere of influence of the so-called „Serbian world“ and the risk of eroding its civic and multicultural character. In turn, such a scenario would have a destabilizing impact on the situation in the region as a whole.

Diplomatic Standoff

01. GUYANA - VENEZUELA Events, Incidents

On December 3, 2023, at the initiative of President Nicolás Maduro, a referendum took place in Venezuela regarding claims to a portion of the territory of neighboring Guyana – the Essequibo region. Its purpose was to legitimize the annexation of the region, establish a new state of Guyana-Essequibo in its place, and grant Venezuelan citizenship to the local population.

The results of the referendum showed 95% support for the occupation of Essequibo. The region itself is sparsely populated, challenging terrain with significant oil deposits. It occupies almost 60% of Guyana's territory, but only 15% of the country's population resides there.

Venezuela's preparation for aggressive actions was noticeable several months before the referendum. In October, information emerged that Venezuelan military personnel were building a runway near the border with Guyana. Later, it became known that Venezuela was establishing a new naval base, which would increase the coverage of its naval forces along the Atlantic Ocean coastline.

Understanding Maduro's intentions, Guyana's representatives began raising alarm and urging the international community to prevent violations of international law. External support is Guyana's only hope, as it lacks the military strength to defend itself, with around 3,000 soldiers, compared to Venezuela's 125-150 thousand military personnel.

In response to escalating tension in the region, Brazil began accumulating forces on the

border with Guyana and Venezuela. Brazilians are attempting mediation between the two countries to avoid an armed conflict. Reports from Brazilian intelligence indicate an imminent military operation by the Venezuelan army against Guyana in the coming days, raising concerns about regional stability and territorial disputes in South America.

On December 7, the United States announced that they would conduct a series of joint flight exercises with the Guyana Defence Forces to strengthen cooperation between the two countries in the field of security. Venezuela's Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino Lopez called the U.S. actions a provocation, stating that Venezuela would not deviate from efforts to regain control of Essequibo.

On December 14, high representatives (including presidents) of Venezuela and Guyana met in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and agreed not to use force and not to escalate tensions around Essequibo. Further negotiations are scheduled to take place in Brazil within three months.

Intensity

Diplomatic standoff, probable annexation attempt.

Trends

Considering the power imbalance and the weak position of the United States, the occupation of Essequibo seems inevitable. Venezuela is currently testing the reaction of its neighbors and the international community to its aggressive actions, and so far, everything is going as Nicolás Maduro

desires.

An attack on Guyana will signify the final loss of influence for the United Kingdom in South America since Guyana is a member of the British Commonwealth.

Impact on Global Processes

Venezuela's actions continue the trend of destabilizing the security situation globally, primarily serving Russia's interests. Moscow's involvement goes beyond selling military equipment to Maduro, as there are two Russian military bases located in Venezuela, along with the Wagner Group, which is involved in training Venezuelan elite forces and ensuring Maduro's personal security. It is likely that the decision to

annex the territory of Guyana involved Kremlin advisers.

Destabilization in South America signifies Washington's practical abandonment of the so-called Monroe Doctrine regarding the role of the United States in the American region. The Biden administration holds a particularly weak position on these events, conceding leadership positions to Russia and China.

Forecast

It is likely that within a few weeks or months, the annexation of Essequibo will occur not only on paper but also through armed means. Guyana will be unable to offer significant resistance due to a substantial difference in military potential between the parties.

02. CHINA - TAIWAN

Events, Incidents

Taiwan spent the year 2023, like all the previous ones, in the shadow of a possible invasion by the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the near future. In total, over 4,000 aircraft flew near the island, with 1,700 entering the air defense identification zone. 65% of them were fighter jets (mostly Shenyang J-16). However, Beijing did not send its most advanced aircraft, the Chengdu J-20, over Taiwan, or it went undetected by the air defense identification zone due to its low visibility.

Incidents involving aircraft for anti-submarine warfare and helicopters (including Soviet/Russian Ka-28) were also recorded. Analysts noted that China currently lacks tanker aircraft, raising questions about acquiring and maintaining air superiority in the event of a hypothetical conflict. Taiwan observed a record number of UAVs in 2023: 145. Drones like

the Harbin BZK-005 can fly for extended periods at medium altitudes. However, provocations and pressure are not limited to the skies alone. On the water, the Chinese fleet follows the same policy in the Taiwan Strait, occasionally approaching within 24 nautical miles (38 km) of Taiwan's territorial waters.

Intensity

Diplomatic standoff with provocations from the PRC.

Forecast

Elections will soon take place on the island, and it is most likely that the president will change. Lai Ching-te of the Democratic Progressive Party is currently considered the favorite. From 2017 to 2019, he served as the premier of the self-proclaimed republic. He enjoys the support of the most radical nationalists. If he wins, China will do everything to further provoke and isolate Taiwan.

03.

KOREAN PENINSULA

Events, Incidents

Tension is escalating on the Korean Peninsula due to provocative actions by North Korea. This includes not only missile tests but also an increase in nuclear weapons production.

After a harsh wave of COVID and natural disasters, North Korea appears externally weakened again. However, the regime still stands firm. Relations with the South continue to deteriorate and, according to Kim Jong-un, have reached the level of «two hostile states.» There have been several violations of agreements since 2018, including the establishment of new border posts in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). North Korea promised to deploy heavy and new weaponry there. South Korea also deviated from its commitments by resuming aerial reconnaissance. There is a real risk that both Koreas will abandon the agreement.

On New Year's Day, Pyongyang declared that it would no longer seek reunification with Seoul. On May 18, 2023, North Korea launched the new intercontinental ballistic missile Hwasong-18 – theoretically the world's largest.

On August 16, North Korea captured U.S. soldier Travis King after an allegedly illegal border crossing. Travis faced dishonorable discharge from the U.S. Army over allegations in South Korea. He was released on September 27 and received eight charges under U.S. military law.

On August 31, North Korea conducted missile firings simulating a powerful strike against the South, in protest of joint exercises by Washington and Seoul.

On January 5, 2024, the North Korean military shelled the islands of South Korea, Yeonpyeongdo, and Baengnyeongdo. In response, Seoul initiated its own artillery exercises.

Intensity

Diplomatic standoff with sporadic security threats to the region.

Negotiations Between Parties

Currently, no significant contacts have been recorded, relations are deteriorating, and mutual accusations and threats are escalating.

Impact on Global Processes

On September 12, Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong-un met at a summit in Vladivostok. Prior to this, Lavrov and Shoigu visited the closed country. For Kim, it was arguably his first foreign trip in several years. Kim promised various support to Putin, including weapons and ammunition.

By November 1, it became known that North Korea had transferred at least 1 million artillery shells to Russia. South Korean intelligence informed journalists that, according to their data, short-range rockets, anti-tank, and anti-aircraft missiles were also sent to Russia. However, it is now known that the Russians used medium-range ballistic missiles (900 km) against Ukraine. In return, Kim may have received food, money, electricity, and weapon blueprints.

On November 22, North Korea successfully launched a satellite (with, as is now believed, Russian assistance).

Forecast

Maintaining the status quo with periodic security crises provoked by North Korea, such as island shelling by 2024. The development of nuclear and missile programs will continue (it already effectively bypasses Russian production, especially concerning strategic nuclear weapons, its quality, and delivery methods). Cooperation with Russia will increase, dependent on arms supplies from Pyongyang.

04. SERBIA - KOSOVO

Events, Incidents

In the turbulent year of 2023, the strained relations between Kosovo and Serbia reached a critical point, marking one of the most challenging periods since the 1999 war. The prolonged crisis in northern Kosovo, rooted in 2021, began with a change of power in Pristina and an attempt to alter the existing status quo in relations with the northern neighbor. The new government of Kosovo, led by Prime Minister Albin Kurti, introduced measures aimed at integrating the Serbian population, especially in regions of their compact residence, and aligning administrative aspects in relations with Serbia, such as policies regarding identification documents, license plates, and more. These steps initially sparked sharp protests in the partially recognized republic and Serbia but were later skillfully used by Belgrade to escalate the security situation, leading to a significant increase in conflict risks in the region.

Entering the new year of 2023, Kosovo lacked official representation in the north and awaited early elections, initially scheduled for December 2022 but postponed to April 2023 under pressure from Western partners, Serbia, and representatives of the Serbian minority.

Early local elections were boycotted by ethnic Serbs. In early December of the previous year, representatives of the Serbian minority withdrew from all Kosovar institutions, including the police, courts, and local authorities, a crucial moment in the unfolding events. This withdrawal was a minority protest against the mandatory registration of vehicles under Kosovar law.

Elections and Escalation

Due to problems with filling elected positions, the question of holding new local elections in northern Kosovo, in municipalities with

predominantly Serbian populations, arose. Elections were repeatedly postponed due to protests and calls from Western partners, but eventually took place in April. However, Kosovo Serbs in northern Kosovo decided to boycott the voting, resulting in a voter turnout of just over 3%, primarily consisting of local Albanians. As Kosovo's legislation lacks conditions where low turnout would render elections illegitimate, this led to an unprecedented situation where Kosovo Albanians became mayors and deputies of local authorities in municipalities with a Serbian majority in the north.

Attempts by the newly elected officials to take the oath and assume office were met with protests from local residents, escalating into clashes with the Kosovar police and KFOR forces. Despite the challenges, the elected officials managed to enter administrative buildings, often using force. In some cases, newly elected deputies and mayors took the oath in villages with Albanian populations. Serbia declared the elections illegitimate, placed its army on full combat readiness, and moved it to the border with Kosovo, interpreting the situation in the north as an occupation. The broader context of these events included weeks of mass protests in Belgrade, sparked by two mass shootings in Serbia and directed against violence, state media monopoly, and the government, putting the current Serbian authorities in a vulnerable position and, as many times before, pushing them to play the Kosovo card and shift the public focus.

The second half of the year did not become calmer. On June 13, Kosovo police entered Zvečan, where they arrested local Serbian leader Milun Milenkovic on charges of organizing Serbian protests. This arrest led to a new wave of disturbances, resulting in three police officers being injured. The next day, Serbian police

arrested three Kosovo police officers, claiming they crossed the border with Central Serbia. Kosovo denied this claim, accusing Serbian police of entering Kosovo and kidnapping police officers. In response, Kosovo announced a ban on Serbian goods and entry of vehicles with Serbian license plates.

The peak of escalation was the September incident in the municipality of Zvecan. A group of approximately 30 armed Kosovo Serbs and Serbian militants staged a shootout in the village of Banjska, resulting in the death of one police officer. Subsequently, the group of militants barricaded themselves inside a monastery and remained there until an operation by Kosovo special forces, during which three armed individuals were killed, and six others were arrested by the Kosovo police. An arsenal of weapons was found at the scene, and according to Kosovo, evidence of organizing this action from Serbian territory.

A key distinction from previous stages was the loss of lives, signaling a crossing of a conditional red line and indicating that the most important and urgent task of peacekeeping efforts - to save lives - had failed, and previous agreements, whether in Brussels or Ohrid, were not working. Serbia again put its forces on combat readiness and deployed them to the border with Kosovo. In response to further escalation, NATO decided to increase its military presence in the region.

Intensity

Internal political crisis, diplomatic confrontation.

Casualties

At least one fatality during the shootings.

Trends

The situation in the region was spiraling into a prolonged crisis with the risk of creating a new «gray» zone in northern Kosovo, a complete rollback of the previous progress in Kosovo-Serbia relations achieved within the Brussels Agreement of 2013, and a significant increase in the likelihood of a new conflict in the Balkans.

A ray of hope was the meeting between Kurti and Vucic in March, which took place in Ohrid, North Macedonia, mediated by the EU. During this meeting, the parties agreed on several points regarding the development of good neighborly relations, such as mutual recognition of documents, acknowledgment of each other's territorial integrity, the right to self-determination (without Serbia recognizing Kosovo's independence), protection of the Orthodox Church in Kosovo, rejection of the «recognition withdrawal» campaign, and, in general, the continuation of dialogue in the spirit of previous agreements. This dialogue aimed to reduce tension and address the shortcomings of previous Brussels agreements, where the creation of the «Association of Serbian Communities» in the northern part of the country became the decisive and most controversial aspect.

Although the agreements seemed like a serious and important step, the parties supported them only verbally, and subsequent events in the region undermined the success of their implementation.

Impact on Global Processes

The initial reaction of the West to the results of local extraordinary elections was somewhat unexpected. Western envoys expressed disappointment with the low voter turnout

and condemned the actions of the Kosovo government. As tension escalated, the EU, the US, and the UK called for calm, urging Prime Minister Albin Kurti to engage in dialogue with Belgrade and return to the implementation of the EU-facilitated Ohrid agreements. Under pressure on Kurti's government, the EU and the US imposed a series of sanctions, such as canceling joint military exercises and reducing the level of representation and participation of Kosovar representatives in official events, dealing a serious blow to the partially recognized republic and causing misunderstanding and a sense of betrayal in Kosovo society.

Forecast

At the end of 2023, the Balkan region enters a deeper crisis, and we can observe increased risks of a new conflict in the region. Possible changes are occurring with the participation of the Kosovo government, which has expressed an intention to hold repeat elections in the

north, as a substitute for the boycotted April elections. It is also worth noting the dissolution of the Serbian parliament by Vucic, occurring in the context of ongoing protests and the Kosovo crisis. However, most likely, these steps will not lead to significant changes and will not effectively reduce the tension.

Although the best scenario would be a return to the implementation of agreements, in 2024, further destabilization of the situation remains possible. Serbian President Vucic may try to use these events to gain domestic political advantages, using the threat of a new conflict near the EU borders to pressure the West. The confrontation is likely to persist or even take on new forms, complicating the already tense situation in the region. The ability to find common ground, reduce tension, and return to constructive negotiations remains a crucial task, as an alternative scenario is far from a positive development.

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