



Press release "Conflict Barometer 2009"

Heidelberg institute: Number of highly-violent conflicts decrease, but no reason to signal the all-clear

Heidelberg, 12/15/09. In its "Conflict Barometer 2009", the Heidelberg Institute of International Conflict Research (HIK) is presenting its newest data and analyses on the global conflict development. The analysts of the HIK counted 365 overall conflicts, 31 of which were classified as highly violent, i.e. containing the massive employment of organized violence and causing lasting destruction. Seven of these highly violent conflicts were classified as wars: the conflict between the Taliban and the Afghan government caused more than 1,000 civilian casualties. Also, the Taliban fought with the government as well as different tribes in Pakistan, causing more than 5,000 fatalities. The Israeli army launched operation "Cast Lead" in the Gaza Strip to counter rocket attacks of Hamas and other militant groups. In Northern Yemen, Shiite rebels were engaged in fierce battles with government troops. A large-scale offensive of the Sri Lankan army ended with the military defeat of the "Tamil Tigers" in May. The conflict between several Islamist groups and the transitional government in Somalia caused hundreds of thousands internally displaced persons. Four of these conflicts had already been fought on the level of a war since 2006.

Despite the slight decrease of highly violent conflicts from 39 to 31, the analysts would rate any optimism as premature. Lotta Mayer, member of the board, stated: "The highly violent conflicts are usually part of larger regional conflict systems where conflict dynamics mutually incite each other. Thus, de-escalation of single conflicts is possibly only a temporary phenomenon." The decrease did not indicate a trend as the number of highly violent conflicts had been oscillating around 35 in recent years, in comparison to 51 highly violent conflicts in 1992. Thus, the temporary escalations and de-escalations rather indicated a generally fragile situation. Furthermore, the analysts documented 112 conflicts with a sporadic use of violence that were classified as crises and contain a high escalation risk for the future.

The Middle East, Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa were the most affected regions accounting for nine highly violent conflicts each. In Africa, a connected conflict area extended from Nigeria through the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan to Somalia. Another continuous conflict belt extended from the Middle East to Asia, reaching from Israel and Yemen through Iraq and Afghanistan to Pakistan and India as well as Sri Lanka. In the Americas, the number of highly violent conflicts increased from two to three, which was related to large-scale drug-related crime. While the situation in Europe calmed down after the Russian withdrawal from Georgia, the Russian-Georgian relations nevertheless remained tense and the situation in the Russian Caucasian Republics of Chechnya and Ingushetia deteriorated.

Since 1991, the Heidelberg Institute of International Conflict Research (HIK) has been devoted to the research, documentation and analysis of the inter-state and international conflicts on a global scale. The annual publication "Conflict Barometer" offers an overview over the contemporary development of violent as well as non-violent conflicts. The current publication is available for free downloading at www.hiik.de as of 12/15/2009.

Please find the current world map of highly violent conflicts in 2009 attached. We will be happy to provide you with additional maps and material.

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