

2024

ANNUAL REPORT

FORGOTTEN WARS



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No conflict is too small to be told

Matteo Balzarini Zane

Forgotten Wars: Annual Report 2024

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An Overview of 2024

Syria: pockets of resistance and tensions persist between the government, rebel groups, and foreign intervention forces. Yemen: despite diplomatic efforts, a definitive resolution has yet to be reached, while clashes continue between Houthi rebels and the Saudi-backed progovernment coalition. Sahel: instability related to the activities of jihadist groups is on the rise. Democratic Republic of Congo: violence continues among military forces, clandestine armed groups, and the civilian population. Central and Mesoamerica: there is an escalation of clashes between drug traffickers and government forces; Mexico, Honduras, Colombia, and Brazil are experiencing a dramatic increase in drug-related homicides. Southeast Asia: growing tensions between China and Taiwan raise concerns, fuelled by Beijing's military exercises of the island.

According to the ACLED Conflict Index, in 2024, over 50 armed conflicts of varying intensity were continuously active, of which at least 15 can be classified as high-intensity wars. United Nations data indicates that the number of direct conflict-related casualties have surpassed 250,000 annually, while over 100 million people are displaced as a result of military operations and guerrilla actions. The deadliest conflicts are reported in Ukraine, Sudan, Yemen, and the Gaza Strip, while the number of terrorist attacks (especially in the Sahel) has increased by 20% compared to 2023. Another significant statistic is the rise in global military spending, which exceeded 2.2 trillion of U.S. dollars in 2024, marking a 5% increase from the previous year. These figures (which are expected to rise through this year) highlight the growing militarisation of international relations and the increasing difficulty in finding lasting solution, as well as the gradual cooling of diplomatic relations within international institutions in favour of bilateral agreements.

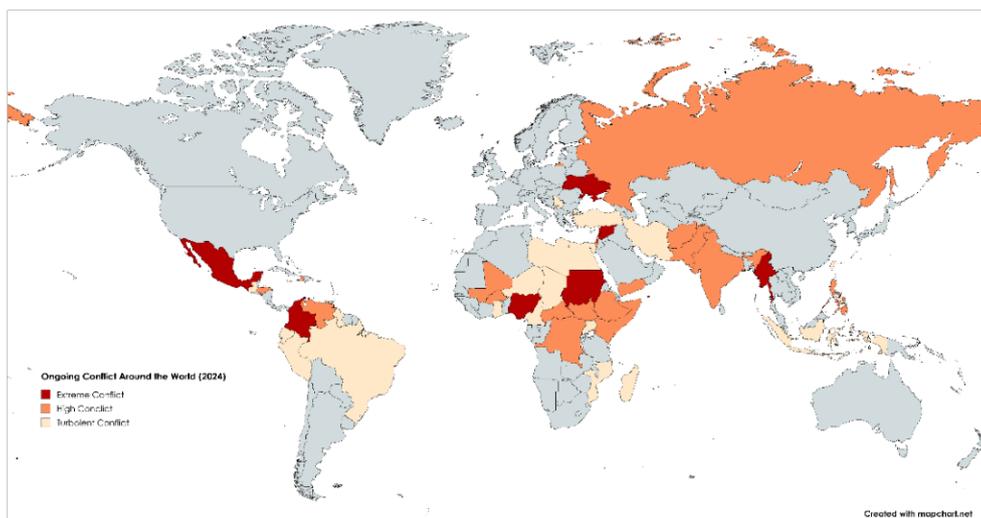


Figure 1. Ongoing conflict around the world (2024)

In this context, the humanitarian consequences of conflicts are devastating and manifest in multiple aspects, of which the cost in terms of human lives and displaced individuals is only the beginning. The destruction of critical infrastructure contributes to increasing vulnerability among civilian populations in wartime contexts, resulting in an inevitable loss of access to essential services such as healthcare and

education, as well as food and potable water. The most vulnerable groups (such as women, children, and minorities) suffer disproportionately as they are more exposed to violence and exploitation, generating a cycle of poverty and political-economic instability that can persist for several years following the resolution of armed conflict.

Major Ongoing Conflicts

Russian-Ukrainian War

Among the most intense fronts is undoubtedly the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, which saw the eastern Ukrainian front at the centre of clashes in the past year, with particularly violent battles in the regions of Donetsk, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia. On the one hand, Ukrainian forces continued their counteroffensive from the south, albeit with significant difficulties and at a much slower pace than anticipated. On the other hand, the Russian army, following repeated failures of advances supported by North Korea units, has fundamentally reinforced defensive positions in the areas of Vovchansk, Hlyboke, Bakhmut, and Kherson.

One of the most significant developments is the increasing use of drones and precision weapons by both sides: Kiev, through Turkish reconnaissance drones Bayraktar TB2 and American kamikaze drones Switchblade-300, intensified attacks on strategic Russian infrastructures in the Belgorod, Kursk, and Rostov Oblasts, targeting ammunition depots, logistical bases, and refineries; Moscow, utilising mainly Iranian kamikaze drones Shahed-136, continued to launch missile attacks on Kiev, Dnipro, Sloviansk, Kramatorsk, and other major Ukrainian cities, causing significant damage to civilian and energy infrastructure as well as supply networks.

Throughout 2024, the West continued to provide support to Kiev, bringing total allocations to approximately 290 billion of U.S. dollars; the European Union and the United States remain the primary financiers of Ukraine, but the growing internal debt of both superpowers is increasingly complicating the management of long-term assistance commitments, as observed from the unsuccessful outcome of the meeting between Zelensky and Trump on February 28, 2025. Meanwhile, Moscow has strengthened its relations with China, Iran, and North Korea, securing military support and supplies that have allowed it to maintain its war effort despite international sanctions clearly affecting the Russian national economy.

Prospects for the end of the conflict remain uncertain: the possibility of a temporary ceasefire continues to be discussed in various diplomatic contexts (now also with mediation from the Trump administration), but the conditions set by both parties have so far made it difficult to reach an agreement; while Ukraine aims to achieve as many military successes as possible to strengthen its negotiating position, Russia seems determined to maintain control of occupied territories at all costs, a situation that logically suggests a medium-term stabilisation of military operations along the current front, with an intensification of asymmetric operations and targeted attacks by both sides.

Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Another conflict that has received extensive media coverage is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which in 2024 was characterised by large-scale military operations involving neighbouring Lebanon, Syria, and Iran. Within the Gaz Strip, these operations resulted in a high number of civilian casualties and massive destruction of infrastructure: according to reports from Reuters, over 44.000 Palestinians lost their lives, and about two-thirds of the residents in the Strip were forced to leave their homes due to intense firefights between Hamas and the Israeli army. In parallel, Tel Aviv launched an unprecedented offensive in the West Bank, levelling several refugee centres and numerous civilian homes; this seven-week operation was justified by Israeli authorities as necessary to ensure the security of settler communities, but many analysts interpreted these moves as an attempt to consolidate control over Palestinian Territories.

The Israeli military operations raised serious concerns about the possible war crimes and genocide allegations, prompting the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to request arrest warrants (validated on November 21, 2024) for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, accusing them of extermination, using famine as a method of warfare, denying humanitarian aid, and massacring civilians. Additionally, a report from the United Nations High Commissioner for Humanitarian Rights and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories supported the war crimes allegations against the Netanyahu administration, significantly contributing to the verdict of a UN Special Commission that concluded Israel's war practices exhibit characteristics of genocide.

The destruction of fundamental infrastructure and interruption of supplies in the Gaza Strip and West Bank led to a severe humanitarian crisis, marked by acute shortages of essential services such as potable water, electricity, and healthcare. Despite the intensity of the conflict, significant efforts were made to achieve a stable ceasefire and initiate long-term peace negotiations: in January 2025, a 60-day truce was announced between Israel and Hamas, which also included the release of hostages and prisoners from both sides; the truce, which currently seems to be holding, allowed the entry of humanitarian aid from Lebanon, and Egypt, offering hope for reconstruction and lasting peace in the region, but it remains to be seen how U.S. intervention and recent developments in Syria will affect this delicate balance.

Sudan's Civil War

In 2024, Sudan continued to be a particularly volatile front, with the civil war that erupted in April 2023 causing one of the worst humanitarian crises globally. The conflict pits the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) against the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) resulting in brutal clashes. This crisis was further exacerbated by the decision of U.S. President Donald Trump to suspend foreign aid programs, which jeopardised the operation of numerous health centres and community kitchens, leading to a significant increase in mortality, especially in Khartoum and Darfur.

Militarily, after a first part of the year without significant changes in the status quo, the RSF captured Al-Fulah, the capital of Western Kordofan, on June 20, 2024, without sparing fleeing civilians. This led the SAF to launch a large-scale offensive against RSF positions in Khartoum in September, attacking from the South,

East and West in an attempt to encircle the enemy. Despite carpet bombing, government forces encountered strong urban resistance, prolonging the clashes throughout the following month; at the same time, in the regions of Sannar and Gezira, a second counteroffensive was launched to retake territories previously under RSF control. In November, the conflict reached a critical phase, with both factions ruling out negotiations and rejecting mediation proposal.

Although the actual figures may be much higher, according to UN data, the civil war has so far resulted in at least 20.000 deaths and 14 million displaced people; over 30 million people, including 16 million children (with about 770.000 potentially suffering from severe acute malnutrition), require urgent humanitarian assistance in a context where both sides hinder aid delivery and humanitarian organisations document numerous serious violations and widespread sexual violence daily. Despite various UN Security Council resolutions, effective actions to end the conflict have not been implemented yet, leaving only the prospect of further developments in 2025.

No Conflict Is Too Small to Be Told

In analysing contemporary armed conflicts, public opinion and mainstream media tend to focus on a limited number of war theatres, typically those involving major global powers or conflicts with immediate and large-scale geopolitical implications. This selective focus on wars such as those in Ukraine, Palestine or Sudan stems from several factors, including geographical proximity, direct involvement of key actors, and, crucially, selective media coverage. However, conflicts occurring in less visible contexts often serve as arenas where regional and global powers indirectly confront one another.

The concept of “invisible wars” (or, in our case, of “forgotten wars”) encompasses more than the lack of media attention; it also highlights analytical challenges stemming from unreliable data, fragmented actors, and the intricate interplay of local and international power dynamics. These conflicts frequently involve non-state actors, mercenaries, local militias, and rebel groups that elude conventional frameworks of armed conflict analysis. Understanding these wars is essential to forecast future global crises, identifying emerging trends in asymmetric warfare, and equipping policymakers with effective tools for international security management. Without systematic analysis, the risk of addressing crises only after they have escalated rather than preventing them through diplomatic interventions and stabilisation strategies arises.

Beyond their political implications, forgotten wars profoundly affect the global economic system: many of these conflicts occur in regions rich in strategic natural resources; and the instability in such areas can disrupt supply chains with severe repercussions for global markets. Moreover, this instability fosters the growth of underground economies, illicit trafficking, and corruption, hindering local economic development and exacerbating poverty and vulnerability among affected populations. This cycle creates fertile ground for recruitment into clandestine armed groups, criminal clans, and terrorist organisations, fuelling and endless spiral of violence.

Comprehending 21st-century geopolitics requires a thorough examination of all ongoing conflicts, not just those receiving extensive media coverage. Neglecting wars outside the spotlight leaves zones of uncontrolled instability that can evolve into global threats. Consequently, it is imperative to reconsider the role of media in covering forgotten wars: while selective narratives are inevitable, they contribute to a distorted perception of international dynamics and prevent civil society from fully grasping the implications of foreign policy and global security strategies.

The Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis

The conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh has deep roots in the complex relationships between Armenia and Azerbaijan, two nations marked by profound ethnic, cultural, and religious differences. Nagorno-Karabakh, a mountainous region located within the internationally recognized borders of Azerbaijan, is predominantly inhabited by Christians of Armenian descent. During the Soviet era, Stalin designated the territory as an autonomous oblast within Azerbaijan, a decision that laid the groundwork for future tensions. By the 1980s, as the Soviet Union began to decline, demands for self-determination emerged from the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh, leading to violent clashes between the two communities.

The issue of Nagorno-Karabakh has historical roots that extend beyond the Soviet period. During the medieval era, the area was part of various Armenian kingdoms, which helped solidify its Armenian cultural identity. However, in subsequent centuries, control over the territory shifted among various powers, including Persia and later the Russian Empire. In the 19th century, the region was incorporated into the Russian Empire, further intensifying rivalries between Armenian and Azerbaijani communities, both vying for greater autonomy and political influence. During Armenia and Azerbaijan's brief independence from 1918 to 1920, Nagorno-Karabakh became a contested area marked by violent confrontations involving regional powers. The Soviet authorities' annexation of the region to Azerbaijan in 1921 was perceived by Armenians as an historical injustice, fostering latent tensions for decades. This decision was made for strategic reasons and to maintain ethnic balance but continued to provoke resentment among the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh.



Figure 2. Flag of Republic of Armenia

In 1991, with the collapse of the USSR, relations deteriorated into open warfare between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The conflict lasted until 1994 and resulted in tens of thousands of casualties and hundreds of thousands displaced, becoming one of the worst humanitarian crises in the region. Armenia managed to gain control over Nagorno-Karabakh and seven surrounding districts with support from the Armenian diaspora and a network of alliances, creating a situation of territorial occupation that Azerbaijan never accepted. Despite

a ceasefire mediated by Russia in 1994, the conflict remained unresolved, fuelled by decades of nationalist rhetoric, historical grievances, and geopolitical rivalries. The following years were characterized by a fragile balance with sporadic clashes along the contact line. A brief but intense escalation in 2016 known as the "four-day war" highlighted the volatility of the situation and demonstrated both nations' capacity to mobilize forces quickly while exposing vulnerabilities in the 1994 ceasefire agreement. Although there were no significant changes in territorial positions, this episode underscored the difficulty of achieving lasting stability.



Figure 3. Flag of Republic of Azerbaijan

However, it was in 2020 that the conflict erupted again on a large scale. Between September and November, Azerbaijan launched a military offensive aimed at reclaiming territories lost in the 1990s. With technological and military support from Türkiye, including advanced drones, Baku achieved significant successes on the battlefield, regaining much of the occupied territory and consolidating its position. This military campaign was marked by intense bombardments and modern military technologies that rapidly reshaped conflict dynamics. The ceasefire agreement on November 10, 2020, mediated by Russia, ended hostilities but did not address the underlying causes of the conflict. Following the 2020 war, Azerbaijan's government initiated a systematic plan to consolidate control over reclaimed territories; however, the presence of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh remained an unresolved challenge. Meanwhile, local Armenians continued to pledge allegiance to the de facto Republic of Artsakh, a politically unrecognized entity supported by Armenia. Declared in 1991, Artsakh sought to assert regional autonomy by building independent political and military institutions. However, Azerbaijan's offensive in 2020 and subsequent diplomatic and military pressure severely undermined its ability to function as an autonomous entity.

The decline of Artsakh has been gradual yet relentless. In 2023, Azerbaijan intensified operations along the contact line, further isolating the region and blocking access to essential supplies. This strategy aimed to weaken Armenian resistance through a combination of economic pressure and military action. The failure to secure safe humanitarian corridors exacerbated an already dire crisis for local populations. By 2024, remaining armed forces in Artsakh were forced to relinquish control over the little territory that remained, effectively marking an end to its de facto republic status. The fall of Artsakh carries not only symbolic consequences for Armenians but also represents a turning point in regional geopolitics. For Azerbaijan, it signifies a victory that

consolidates territorial sovereignty; conversely, for Armenia, it raises questions about its ability to protect Armenian communities beyond its borders. For local populations, Artsakh's collapse signifies a loss of political and cultural identity that had endured for over three decades.

Current Situation

Throughout 2023 and early 2024, numerous skirmishes occurred along the front line, indicating a persistent violation of the ceasefire by both parties. One of the most serious incidents took place in Shusha on March 18, 2024, resulting in the deaths of ten Azerbaijani soldiers and seven Armenians. Both sides accused each other of initiating hostilities, escalating a warlike rhetoric that raises international concerns. Just two months later, on May 23, 2024, another deadly incident resulted in five casualties, including two Azerbaijani soldiers and three Armenian officers, during a check on a convoy suspected of transporting weapons. These episodes illustrate the instability of the situation, which is poised to escalate into a large-scale conflict.

On the diplomatic front, Armenia and Azerbaijan remain distant in their positions. Armenia continues to insist on the right to self-determination for Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh, emphasizing the importance of ensuring security and human rights for local communities. Conversely, Azerbaijan reiterates that Nagorno-Karabakh is an integral part of its sovereign territory and refuses any concessions that could compromise its territorial integrity. These irreconcilable positions have led to an ongoing stalemate in negotiations, with tensions spilling over onto the battlefield. Meanwhile, the humanitarian situation in the region remains critical. Local communities, already severely impacted by the 2020 conflict, face further difficulties due to interruptions in essential supplies such as food, water, and medicine. Appeals for humanitarian corridors from various international organizations have yet to yield concrete responses. Consequently, living conditions for residents of Nagorno-Karabakh continue to deteriorate, fostering an atmosphere of despair and insecurity. In parallel, both countries have undertaken initiatives to strengthen their positions.

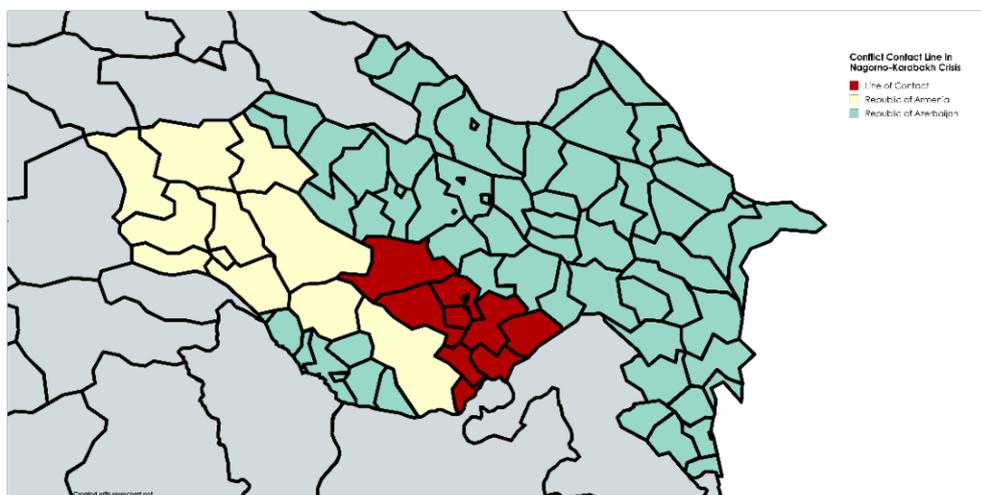


Figure 4. Conflict Contact Line in Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis

In Armenia, the recent electoral victory of the Civil Contract Party marked a leadership change and a more assertive approach towards Azerbaijan. The new government has increased investments in the armed forces and intensified nationalist rhetoric, underscoring the necessity to defend Armenian interests at all costs. This policy has garnered domestic support but has also exacerbated tensions with Baku. Azerbaijan, for its part, has continued to modernize its armed forces, utilizing revenues from gas and oil exports to acquire advanced military equipment. Baku has also bolstered security infrastructure along the front line, sending a clear message that it will not tolerate further challenges to its sovereignty. Azerbaijani leadership under President Ilham Aliyev has repeatedly stated that any attempt to destabilize the region will be met with force.

A contributing factor to the tension is the ongoing militarization of areas adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh. Both countries have increased troop deployments and military resources in the region, heightening the risk of accidental clashes that could quickly escalate into large-scale conflicts. This arms race underscores how both states view the issue as a national security priority, complicating any mediation efforts. Meanwhile, civilian populations continue to endure the most of the conflict's consequences. Many residents of Nagorno-Karabakh live under precarious conditions with limited access to essential services and an uncertain future. The scars from the 2020 conflict remain fresh, and the threat of renewed warfare contributes to a climate of fear and instability. In this context, any hope for peace seems distant, with ordinary lives ensnared in a cycle of violence and deprivation.

Beyond the Borders

European Union

The EU has actively participated in diplomatic efforts to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Although the OSCE Minsk Group, co-chaired by France, Russia, and the United States, has been the primary forum for negotiations, the EU has personally supported these initiatives, striving to facilitate dialogue between the parties despite attempts by Washington and Moscow to marginalize its role in the peace process. Additionally, the EU has provided humanitarian assistance to those affected by the conflict, offering support to displaced people and contributing to infrastructure reconstruction while promoting development projects aimed at improving socioeconomic conditions in the region and addressing the root causes of the conflict to foster reconciliation among communities. In response to tensions and ceasefire violations, the EU has implemented monitoring missions to observe the situation on the ground, aiming to reduce hostilities, promote trust between parties, and ensure compliance with ceasefire agreements. However, the effectiveness of these missions has sometimes been limited by a lack of full access to affected areas and the complexity of the geopolitical situation.

The EU has developed bilateral relations with both Armenia and Azerbaijan, attempting to balance its interests and promote stability in the region. With Armenia, the EU signed a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in 2017 to strengthen political and economic cooperation; meanwhile, it has negotiated a partnership agreement with Azerbaijan to deepen relations, although issues related to human rights and democracy have posed challenges in this context. Despite these agreements, some observers have

noted that the EU has failed to exert sufficient pressure on both parties to implement the Madrid Principles (which include, among other things, the withdrawal of Armenian forces from occupied territories and defining a status for Nagorno-Karabakh), and that the lack of a common and cohesive foreign policy has limited the EU's ability to act decisively and uniformly. Following recent developments in the conflict, the EU has continued to support dialogue and regional cooperation initiatives, promoting projects involving both nations and other stakeholders. However, the increasing influence of other actors such as Russia and Türkiye, along with escalating tensions between Yerevan and Baku, necessitates a strategic and coordinated approach from the EU to maintain its relevance and effectively contribute to peace and stability in the region.

Georgia

Georgia has consistently upheld the territorial integrity and sovereignty of its neighbouring states, recognizing Nagorno-Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan in accordance with international law. Simultaneously, Tbilisi has maintained close diplomatic and cultural relations with Armenia, hosting a significant Armenian community within its borders. Georgia's neutrality regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is underpinned by two fundamental reasons: firstly, Georgian territory serves as a transit corridor for trade and energy between Europe and Asia; secondly, the geographical proximity to the conflict necessitates prioritizing stability in the South Caucasus. Any escalation in the region could directly impact Georgian national security, especially considering the presence of minority groups within Georgia that require a balanced approach to prevent internal tensions and ensure social cohesion. Indeed, both Armenian and Azerbaijani communities in Georgia have repeatedly expressed concerns and solidarity with their respective countries of origin, creating potential sources of internal tension that the government must manage carefully amidst pressures from various political and civil groups advocating for more decisive positions in favour of one side.

Over the years, Georgia has undertaken several initiatives to promote peace and regional cooperation: it has positioned itself as a venue for negotiations and diplomatic meetings aimed at facilitating dialogue between Armenia and Azerbaijan; it has promoted trilateral cooperation initiatives in sectors such as energy, transportation, and security to foster positive interdependencies among the three South Caucasian countries; and it has provided humanitarian assistance to refugees and displaced persons during the most intense phases of the conflict. Tbilisi's actions must be understood in relation to its efforts to maintain equilibrium in its relationships with major global powers: while remaining critically distant due to historical tensions, Georgia has acknowledged Moscow's role as a mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Furthermore, it has developed a strategic partnership with Türkiye, collaborating on energy and infrastructure projects while avoiding complete alignment with Ankara's pro-Azerbaijan stance. Lastly, Tbilisi has sought support from the EU and the USA to promote regional stability and has participated in monitoring missions and peacebuilding initiatives sponsored by these actors.

People's Republic of China

China has consistently advocated for a peaceful resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through dialogue and negotiations. During recent escalations, China reiterated its hope that Armenia and Azerbaijan would resolve their differences through negotiations, avoiding the use of force. This position reflects Beijing's traditional approach of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries while promoting regional

stability. China has developed diplomatic and economic relations with both parties: with Azerbaijan, relations are particularly strong in the energy sector, as China imports oil and natural gas; with Armenia, cooperation extends to various sectors, including infrastructure and technology. However, unlike other powers such as Russia or Türkiye, China has not played an active mediating role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Its participation in diplomatic initiatives has been minimal, preferring to support existing multilateral efforts rather than undertaking unilateral initiatives.

Despite its neutral stance, China has significant economic interests in the South Caucasus region, particularly through its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Stability in this area is crucial for the success of transport corridors and trade routes connecting China to Europe. A ceasefire between Armenia and Azerbaijan could provide China with new opportunities to expand the BRI, creating alternative routes that bypass unstable regions. Moreover, a greater Chinese economic presence could enhance its geopolitical influence, providing leverage in negotiations with countries like Iran. Through this soft-power policy, China has developed diplomatic and economic relations with both parties: with Azerbaijan, relations are particularly strong in the energy sector; with Armenia, cooperation extends to various sectors, including infrastructure and technology. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict exemplifies how China manages complex situations in strategic regions: by promoting stability through economic development, Beijing seeks to expand its influence without compromising bilateral relations or engaging in local disputes.

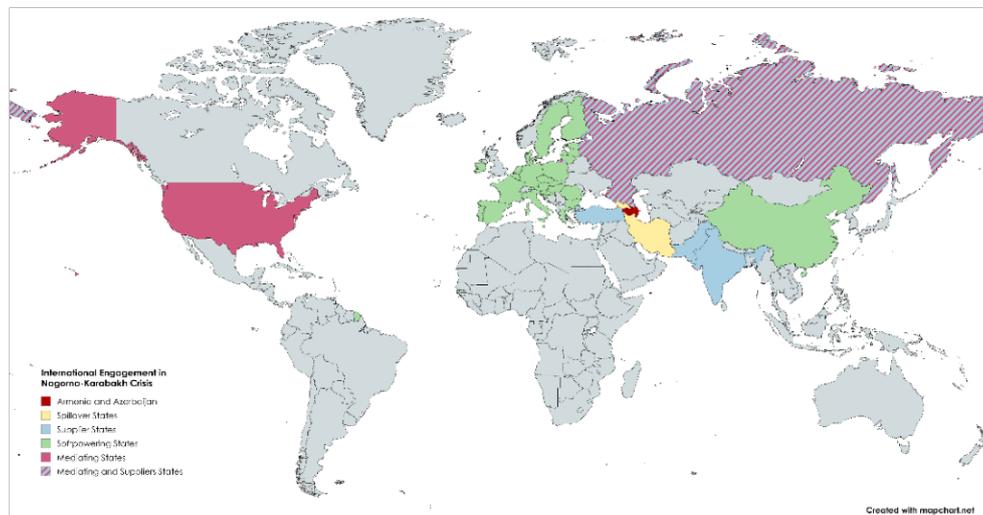


Figure 5. International Engagement in Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis

Republic of Türkiye

Türkiye plays a crucial role in supporting Azerbaijan both militarily and diplomatically. This support is part of a broader strategy by Ankara aimed at enhancing its influence in the South Caucasus and consolidating ties with Turkic-speaking nations. The relationship between Türkiye and Azerbaijan is often characterized by the phrase "two states, one nation," reflecting deep ethnic, cultural, and linguistic ties. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Türkiye was among the first countries to recognize Azerbaijan's independence, quickly establishing diplomatic and cooperative relations. The close cooperation between the two countries was prominently displayed during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, during which Türkiye provided

significant military support to Azerbaijan. This assistance included advanced weaponry, such as Bayraktar-TB2 drones, which proved decisive in Azerbaijani military operations. Additionally, Ankara sent military advisors and facilitated the transfer of Syrian mercenaries to fight alongside Azerbaijani forces, although this latter point has been subject to controversy and official denials.

Türkiye's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict can be interpreted as part of a broader assertive foreign policy strategy often referred to as "neo-Ottomanism," through which Ankara seeks to extend its influence in the Middle East, Eastern Mediterranean, and the Caucasus. The Ankara-Baku axis raises concerns in Armenia, which perceives Turkish support for Azerbaijan as an existential threat, especially considering historical wounds related to the Armenian Genocide. Furthermore, Turkish intervention has complicated relations with Russia, traditionally influential in the region and an ally of Armenia through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Beyond military and political aspects, Azerbaijan is a significant supplier of natural gas and oil for Türkiye, with infrastructure projects like the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline and the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) reinforcing energy interdependence between the two countries. Ensuring stability and security along energy routes through the Caucasus is therefore a priority for Ankara, viewing support for Azerbaijan to protect its strategic interests.

Russian Federation

During the Soviet era, Nagorno-Karabakh was an autonomous oblast within the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic, an administrative decision that laid the groundwork for future ethnic and territorial tensions. Following the collapse of the USSR, Russia sought to maintain its influence in the South Caucasus, a region of strategic importance for geopolitical and economic reasons. Over the years, Russia has taken on the role of mediator in negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, actively participating in the OSCE Minsk Group tasked with finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Concurrently, Moscow has supplied arms to both parties, maintaining a balance of power that has allowed it to exert political leverage over both countries, which has drawn considerable criticism as arms sales to warring nations are viewed as a factor perpetuating hostilities. Nevertheless, Russia mediated a ceasefire agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan on November 9, 2020, ending six weeks of intense fighting. The agreement included the deployment of approximately 2,000 Russian peacekeepers in the region to monitor compliance with the ceasefire and ensure the security of the Lachin corridor, which connects Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh.

Russia maintains complex relations with both countries involved. With Armenia, Moscow has a formal alliance through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and operates a military base in Gyumri. In contrast, Russia has developed significant economic and political ties with Azerbaijan, particularly in the energy sector. This delicate balance allows Moscow to exert influence over both nations but also presents challenges in maintaining an impartial stance during crises. Russia's involvement in the conflict is driven by several strategic interests. Firstly, Moscow aims to preserve its influence in the South Caucasus, a key region for energy security and control over transit routes between Europe and Asia. Secondly, Russia seeks to prevent the expansion of influence from other regional powers, such as Türkiye, which has actively supported Azerbaijan during the conflict. Finally, the Kremlin endeavours to consolidate its image as a guarantor of regional security by strengthening alliances with countries from the former Soviet space.

International Community

The United Nations has repeatedly expressed concern over human rights violations and tensions in Nagorno-Karabakh. Although the Security Council has discussed the situation, no specific sanctions have been adopted against the involved parties, opting instead to promote dialogue and diplomatic solutions.

To address the shortcomings and delays of the UN, in 1992, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) urged its participating States to implement a voluntary embargo on arms supplies to the forces engaged in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. However, as this embargo is non-binding, several member States continued to supply arms to both Armenia and Azerbaijan. The embargo remains formally in place; nonetheless, its enforcement has been limited: numerous OSCE participating States have continued to provide armaments to both Armenia and Azerbaijan since its inception. Furthermore, the embargo does not extend to non-OSCE member States, allowing Azerbaijan to procure weapons from Israel and Pakistan, while Armenia has sourced arms from India.

As a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, the United States has played an active role in negotiations aimed at resolving the conflict. However, the effectiveness of these efforts has been constrained by periods of stalemate and escalations of hostilities, such as during the 2020 escalation when the Trump administration attempted to mediate a humanitarian ceasefire with limited success. Some analysts have pointed out that the balance between strategic and ethical interests has resulted in an ambiguous and sometimes contradictory stance, limiting American influence in resolving the conflict.

Conclusions

One of the main obstacles to a lasting resolution is the depth of identity divisions between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, fuelled by decades of nationalist narratives and mutual distrust. Additionally, the humanitarian consequences of the conflict, which have resulted in thousands of deaths, injuries, and displaced persons, have further polarized the two societies, making it difficult to envision peaceful coexistence in the short term.

Another crucial element for the future of Nagorno-Karabakh is the issue of the region's political status. So far, no negotiated solution has managed to reconcile the aspirations of Armenia and Azerbaijan, while local communities remain trapped in a precarious situation. The lack of clarity regarding Nagorno-Karabakh's status exacerbates latent tensions and hinders a return to lasting normalcy. A viable way out could be the adoption of an advanced autonomy model, guaranteed by an international peacekeeping force. However, this would require significant compromise from both sides, as well as strong support from the international community.

Despite a negotiated solution that includes mutual recognition could account for the most desirable prospect defining Nagorno-Karabakh's status and implementing concrete measures for reconciliation and regional cooperation could lead to a frozen conflict under the current status quo. This scenario may result in

occasional episodes of violence and persistent insecurity for local populations, ensuring a degree of stability in the short term but risking the perpetuation of divisions and hindering a return to sustainable normality. Nonetheless, a return to armed conflict remains a tangible possibility, especially in the absence of progress in negotiations and strengthened confidence-building measures. In such a case, the humanitarian and geopolitical consequences would be devastating, further deteriorating relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan and increasing external intervention from powers such as Russia, Türkiye, and Iran.

The Civil War in Myanmar

Between the 9th and 13th centuries, the Pagan Empire emerged as the first unified kingdom in the region, laying the cultural and spiritual foundations of the nation, particularly through the dissemination of Theravada Buddhism. Following the empire's decline due to Mongol invasions in 1287, the territory fragmented into multiple smaller states. It was not until the 16th century, during the reign of the Taungoo dynasty, that Myanmar was reconstituted; however, it continued to experience considerable instability. In 1886, Myanmar became incorporated into British India, a development that precipitated widespread unrest and catalysed the rise of nationalist movements. Ultimately, the nation achieved independence on January 4, 1948.

The post-independence era has been marked by significant turmoil and ethnic conflict. The aspiration for unity among various minority groups remained largely unfulfilled, resulting in extended periods of civil war. In 1962, a military coup led by General Ne Win established an authoritarian regime grounded in a socialist ideology termed the "Burmese Way to Socialism." This period was characterized by international isolation, economic decline, and political repression. The situation deteriorated further throughout the 1980s and 1990s, culminating in economic collapse and increasing public dissent. In 1988, a major popular uprising was violently suppressed; nevertheless, it led to the establishment of the National League for Democracy (NLD), under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi. The elections of 1990 resulted in a decisive victory for the NLD; however, the military junta disregarded these results and maintained its oppressive governance.



Figure 6. Flag of Republic of the Union of Myanmar

Historically, Myanmar's political landscape has been dominated by authoritarian military regimes. The Constitution enacted in 2008 assigns a crucial role to the military within the governance framework. Specifically, one-quarter of parliamentary seats are reserved for military representatives, who also oversee three critical ministries: Defence, Home Affairs, and Border Affairs. Moreover, the military possesses veto power over constitutional amendments, rendering any reduction of its authority exceedingly difficult. In 2011, a transition toward civilian governance commenced under the military regime, culminating in the general

elections of 2015. These elections resulted in an NLD victory and the ascension of Aung San Suu Kyi as the de facto leader of Myanmar, despite constitutional restrictions on her official title. However, conditions deteriorated once again on February 1, 2021, when the military executed another coup d'état, overthrowing the democratically elected NLD government.

In the wake of this coup, Myanmar plunged into a severe political, economic, and humanitarian crisis. The military justified its actions by alleging electoral irregularities in the 2020 elections, an assertion contested by both international observers and independent analysts. Millions took to the streets demanding a return to democracy despite severe crackdowns by security forces. Human rights organizations reported that thousands were killed or detained while many others were compelled to flee their homes. Concurrently, the coup reignited armed conflicts between the military and ethnic militant groups that have long sought greater autonomy; several factions openly expressed support for pro-democracy movements, exacerbating civil strife.

Globally, both the coup and associated human rights violations have drawn widespread condemnation. The United Nations, the United States, and the European Union have imposed sanctions on military leaders and their enterprises; however, nations such as China and Russia continue to support the regime, complicating diplomatic efforts aimed at resolving this crisis.

Current Situation

The country is composed of over 135 officially recognized ethnic groups, each with their own territorial, cultural, and political claims. Rebel forces often maintain de facto control over semi-autonomous areas where they establish local administrations and collect taxes, exploiting the post-coup chaos to reignite their historical struggles against the central government in Naypyidaw. Alliances between these groups remain fragile, held together primarily by the shared presence of a “common enemy.” The tensions between the Tatmadaw and ethnic militias are deeply rooted in historical rivalries, decades of armed conflict, and failed attempts at constructing a unified national identity. Although the 2008 Constitution officially acknowledges various ethnic nationalities, the central government has often denied them genuine autonomy. The February 1, 2021, coup, which ousted the democratically elected National League for Democracy (NLD) government, further polarized the country. The military junta (SAC) intensified its operations in ethnic conflict zones, but its inability to establish full control has allowed armed groups to consolidate their positions.

The Kachin Independence Army (KIA), active in northern Myanmar, is fighting for greater autonomy for Kachin State and for the recognition of the rights of the predominantly Christian local population. In the southeast, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), one of Myanmar's oldest rebel groups, continues its struggle for increased autonomy for Karen State. Another significant actor is the Arakan Army (AA), operating in Rakhine State, which has recently emerged as one of the most organized militias, leveraging the power vacuum left by the Rohingya crisis. The Arakan Army seeks self-determination for the Rakhine people and has conducted a series of military operations against the Tatmadaw, gaining control over key areas. In addition to

these main groups, dozens of smaller ethnic militias operate across the country, often tied to specific communities. However, their fragmented agendas make sustained cooperation challenging.

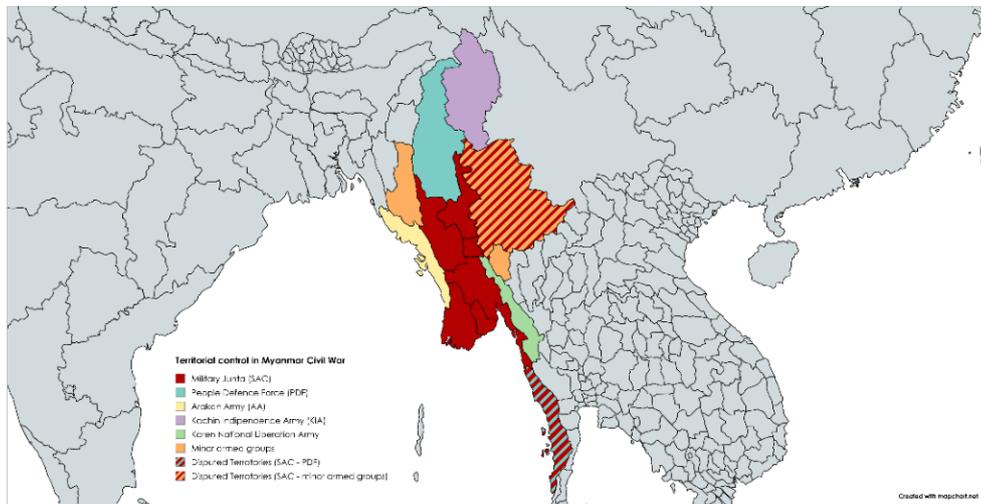


Figure 7. Territorial Control in Myanmar Civil War

Historically, the Tatmadaw has been the dominant political actor in Myanmar. After seizing power in 1962, the armed forces ruled the country for decades, imposing a military dictatorship and brutally suppressing any form of dissent. Even during the democratic transition that began in 2011, the Tatmadaw retained a significant role due to constitutional guarantees enshrined in the 2008 Constitution, which favoured the military establishment. Since the 2021 coup, the Tatmadaw has faced mounting resistance in both urban and rural areas. The People's Defence Forces (PDF), formed as the armed wing of the National Unity Government (NUG), have intensified their attacks against government troops. Nevertheless, the Tatmadaw continues to control major cities and critical infrastructure, despite logistical challenges and battlefield losses.

The civil war has had devastating consequences for the civilian population. Thousands have been killed or injured, and millions have been forced to flee their homes. Refugee camps along the borders with Thailand, India, and China are overcrowded, with living conditions remaining dire. The humanitarian crisis is further compounded by economic instability and the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to manifest itself in localized outbreaks, severely impacting an already fragile healthcare system. Access to humanitarian aid is highly restricted, as the Tatmadaw has imposed widespread blockades, preventing many international organizations from reaching vulnerable communities. Human rights violations, including summary executions, torture, and indiscriminate attacks on civilians, have been widely documented by international actors such as Human Rights Watch.

Beyond the Borders

Kingdom of Thailand

Thailand is directly involved in managing the humanitarian, economic, and security repercussions of Myanmar's civil conflict. Sharing an extensive border of over 2,400 kilometres, Myanmar constitutes a

significant source of instability for Thailand, which must contend with a steady influx of refugees and the risk of conflict tens of thousands of Burmese refugees seeking shelter in Thailand. Camps such as Mae Sot and Mae La host thousands of displaced individuals living in precarious conditions, largely dependent on humanitarian assistance provided by NGOs and the United Nations. This influx of refugees has strained Thai resources, causing tensions within local communities and logistical challenges for the government in Bangkok. In addition to the humanitarian crisis, Thailand faces security challenges related to arms and drug smuggling along the border. The presence of rebel groups and ethnic militias complicates border control efforts, increasing the risk of transboundary armed conflicts. While Thai authorities have intensified patrol and security operations along the border, the porous nature of the frontier renders these efforts only partial. One of the most visible impacts is the arrival of ally effective.

Although the country has sought to mitigate the effects of conflict spillover, economically, Thailand has experienced negative impacts from Myanmar's crisis, particularly due to reduced trade and the closure of certain cross-border routes. Bangkok has adopted a pragmatic approach, cooperating with Myanmar to preserve economic ties and minimize regional instability. Infrastructure projects such as the Trilateral Highway, which connects India, Myanmar, and Thailand, have been delayed due to the conflict but remain a strategic priority for the Thai government. On the diplomatic front, Thailand has attempted to mediate between Myanmar's military junta and opposition forces, playing an active role within ASEAN. However, these efforts have been hindered by the junta's reluctance to engage in meaningful negotiations and the lack of consensus among ASEAN members on how to address the crisis. Despite these challenges, Bangkok has continued to promote dialogue initiatives and provide logistical support for international humanitarian missions.

People's Republic of Bangladesh

Bangladesh, like Thailand, is classified as a spillover state in the Myanmar crisis, largely due to the humanitarian repercussions stemming from the internal conflict and the persecution of the Rohingya. Since 2017, over 700,000 Rohingya refugees have sought shelter in Cox's Bazar, creating one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world. Managing this situation represents an immense challenge for Bangladesh, which faces increasing pressure on its resources and infrastructure. Refugee camps such as Kutupalong and Balukhali are overcrowded and characterized by precarious living conditions. The lack of adequate access to basic services, including healthcare, education, and secure housing, has exacerbated the vulnerability of this population. The Bangladeshi government, in collaboration with international organizations such as the UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP), has provided essential humanitarian support, yet available resources remain insufficient relative to the scale of the crisis. Bangladesh has attempted to negotiate with Myanmar to ensure the voluntary repatriation of the Rohingya; however, these efforts have been hampered by the Burmese government's failure to provide guarantees for security and fundamental rights. The military junta has shown no concrete commitment to creating conditions that would enable the safe and dignified return of refugees, leaving Bangladesh to manage a protracted crisis.

From a security perspective, the presence of refugee camps has raised concerns about the potential recruitment of vulnerable individuals by extremist groups. Additionally, human trafficking and drug

smuggling, frequently occurring across the Bangladesh-Myanmar border, pose significant threats to regional stability. Bangladeshi authorities have intensified border controls, but the available resources are insufficient to effectively address these challenges. Internationally, Bangladesh has appealed to the United Nations and other organizations for greater political and financial support. Although significant aid has been provided, the level of assistance often remains inadequate compared to on-the-ground needs. Furthermore, Bangladesh has sought to raise global awareness of the Rohingya issue, emphasizing the urgency of a political solution that addresses the root causes of the crisis.

People's Republic of China

China plays a crucial role in Myanmar's civil war, leveraging soft power to safeguard its strategic and economic interests. Under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Myanmar is identified as a key component for securing access to the Indian Ocean, providing Beijing with an alternative route to the Malacca Strait. This makes it imperative for China to maintain a degree of stability in the country despite the ongoing internal conflict. One of the most significant BRI projects in Myanmar is the Kyaukpyu port, located on the Bay of Bengal, which serves as the terminal for oil and gas pipelines traversing Myanmar to Yunnan, in southwestern China. These energy corridors are vital for Beijing, reducing its reliance on U.S.-dominated maritime routes and bolstering China's energy security. In addition to energy infrastructure, China has also invested in sectors such as natural resource extraction, including jade, copper, and gold. Myanmar is a major supplier of these resources to the Chinese market, further strengthening bilateral economic ties.

From a diplomatic perspective, China adopts a pragmatic and ambiguous stance. On the one hand, it protects Myanmar's military regime by opposing international sanctions and exercising its veto power at the United Nations Security Council. On the other hand, Beijing maintains contact with ethnic rebel groups, positioning itself as a potential mediator in peace negotiations. This balancing act allows China to safeguard its investments while preventing an escalation of the conflict that could destabilize the broader region. Additionally, through cultural exchange programs, investments in local education and training, and funding pro-China media outlets, Beijing seeks to promote a favourable image of its political and economic model. However, this strategy often encounters resistance from the Myanmar population, which perceives Chinese influence as interference in domestic affairs. Furthermore, popular discontent over China's support for the military junta could fuel anti-China sentiment and jeopardize its long-term investments.

Republic of India

India's "Act East" policy aims to strengthen ties with Southeast Asia, positioning Myanmar as a bridge to ASEAN markets and a buffer against China's expanding influence in the region. One of the most controversial aspects of this policy is India's provision of arms to the Tatmadaw. New Delhi has supplied military equipment, including surveillance systems and armoured vehicles, which have been utilized in operations against rebel groups and opposition forces. This support is viewed as means of maintaining favourable relations with Myanmar's post-coup government while ensuring stability along India's northeastern border, a region plagued by ethnic insurgencies and illicit trafficking of arms and drugs. The shared 1,600-kilometre border presents an ongoing challenge for New Delhi, which fears that instability in Myanmar could exacerbate internal conflicts in India's northeast. In response, India has sought to strengthen ties with Myanmar's ethnic rebel groups,

leveraging them as a buffer to mitigate security threats. This strategy is complex, requiring a delicate balance between supporting the rebels and maintaining diplomatic relations with the military junta.

Simultaneously, India has invested in key infrastructure projects to improve connectivity between the two countries and facilitate trade. The Kaladan Corridor, which links the port of Sittwe to India's northeastern states via a network of roads and waterways, is among the most significant initiatives. This corridor aims to provide India with direct access to the Bay of Bengal, reducing reliance on routes through Bangladesh. Another critical project is the Trilateral Highway, connecting India, Myanmar, and Thailand to promote regional economic integration. India's policy, however, has been criticized for its pragmatism, often perceived as indifferent to the human rights violations committed by Myanmar's military junta. Despite international pressure, India has refrained from taking a firm stance against the regime, prioritizing its strategic interests instead. This ambivalence has raised concerns among human rights advocates and pro-democracy groups.

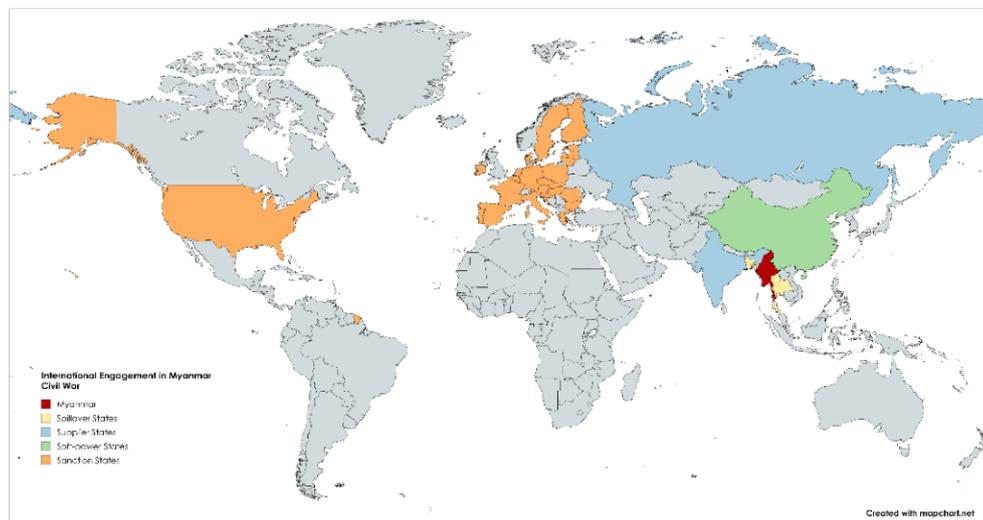


Figure 8. International Engagement in Myanmar Civil War

Russian Federation

Russia is also one of Myanmar's primary arms suppliers, consolidating a strategic relationship rooted in geopolitical and commercial interests. Myanmar represents a key market for Russian arms exports, particularly after the 2021 coup, which further isolated the country on the international stage. Moscow has intensified its supply of helicopters, Sukhoi fighter jets, and air defence systems to the Tatmadaw, enabling the military junta to maintain control over major cities and strategic infrastructure. This military cooperation is driven by mutual interests. On the one hand, Russia seeks to expand its influence in Southeast Asia, countering the dominance of the United States and other Western nations in the region. On the other hand, Myanmar's junta considers Russian supplies essential for strengthening its arsenal and combating both ethnic rebel groups and democratic opposition forces. In addition to arms, Russia has signed agreements to export dual-use technologies, which can serve both civilian and military purposes. These agreements have raised concerns within the international community, which fears such technologies may be used to reinforce internal repression. Human rights organizations have documented the use of Russian-supplied weapon systems in attacks against civilians in conflict zones.

Diplomatically, Russia has supported Myanmar's regime on the international stage, using its veto power at the United Nations Security Council to block resolutions condemning the military junta. This stance aligns with Russia's broader strategy of backing authoritarian governments that can serve as allies against the West. The partnership with Myanmar further strengthens Moscow's position as a global arms supplier, despite economic sanctions imposed by the United States and the European Union. However, Myanmar's increasing international isolation could limit economic opportunities for Russia, while the protracted internal conflict threatens regional stability, potentially undermining Russian projects in Southeast Asia. Moreover, the use of Russian weaponry against civilians has drawn significant criticism, calling into question the legitimacy of Moscow's cooperation with Naypyidaw.

International Community

The international community has intervened through economic sanctions, diplomatic pressure, and humanitarian support. Key actions have been led by actors such as the European Union and the United States, aiming to isolate the military junta and promote a return to a democratic system. These measures include targeted economic sanctions against military leaders and enterprises under their control, particularly in the oil, gas, and natural resource sectors. These industries represent the primary sources of revenue for the Tatmadaw, enabling the regime to fund military operations against rebel groups and maintain control over the country. For instance, the EU has sanctioned the Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE), a critical revenue-generating entity for the regime, while the United States has blocked financial and commercial transactions with military-affiliated entities.

The United Nations, for its part, has played a more limited role due to the cross-vetoes in the Security Council by China and Russia, which shield the junta for geopolitical and economic interests. Nevertheless, the United Nations General Assembly has passed resolutions condemning human rights violations and calling for the restoration of democracy. Although these resolutions are non-binding, they serve as important tools for political and symbolic pressure against the Burmese regime. Diplomatic pressure from the international community has also materialized through the efforts of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), which has attempted to mediate between the junta and the opposition. In 2021, ASEAN adopted a "Five-Point Consensus" that included a cessation of violence and the initiation of constructive dialogue. However, the military junta has disregarded these commitments, undermining the effectiveness of ASEAN's diplomatic initiatives.

In parallel, international humanitarian organizations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have played a crucial role in documenting the human rights violations committed by the Tatmadaw. These reports have helped sustain global attention on the Burmese crisis and pressured governments to adopt more decisive measures. However, limited access to conflict areas and continued obstruction by the junta have made it challenging to deliver humanitarian aid to the most affected communities. Finally, international efforts are further supported by Burmese diasporas, which play an active role in raising global awareness. Through protests, media campaigns, and lobbying efforts, these communities contribute to maintaining international pressure on the military regime.

Conclusions

The prospects for a peaceful resolution to the civil war in Myanmar currently appear distant and uncertain. The internal dynamics of the conflict (characterized by ethnic divisions, the military regime's brutality, and the fragmentation of opposition forces) intersect with a complex web of geopolitical interests and external influences. Actors such as China, India, and Russia pursue strategic and economic agendas that often favour the military junta, while other countries, such as Thailand and Bangladesh, directly experience the repercussions of the crisis through humanitarian emergencies and security challenges. Although the international community has adopted economic sanctions and promoted diplomatic initiatives, it remains far from achieving concrete and effective solutions to halt the violence and foster inclusive dialogue.

Domestically, the situation in Myanmar remains extremely complex. The Tatmadaw continues to exercise violent control over much of the territory, suppressing any form of political or armed opposition. At the same time, ethnic rebel groups and the People's Defence Forces (PDF) are gaining ground in certain areas, but their fragmentation and lack of a united front hinder the prospects for lasting change. Local communities, caught between the junta's military operations and armed militia conflicts, continue to bear the highest burden, facing mass displacements, famines, and systematic human rights violations.

On the international level, the response has been marked by significant ambivalence. While the United States, the European Union, and humanitarian organizations have sought to isolate the military junta through sanctions and diplomatic pressure, the lack of global consensus and the support provided by powers such as China and Russia limit the impact of these measures, including those of the United Nations Security Council. Simultaneously, ASEAN's role has proven insufficient, with mediation efforts often frustrated by the junta's reluctance to engage in constructive dialogue.

Despite these challenges, the international community cannot afford to ignore the crisis in Myanmar. The country remains a critical focal point for the stability of Southeast Asia. A concerted and sustained commitment is essential to promote respect for human rights, ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid to affected populations, and support an inclusive dialogue that involves all stakeholders, including ethnic minorities and pro-democracy forces.

The Essequibo Crisis

The territorial dispute over Essequibo, an area of approximately 159,000 km² situated between the homonymous river and the eastern border of Venezuela, stands as one of the most protracted and intricate controversies in Latin America. Its origins trace back to the colonial period when Spain and the Netherlands established their respective dominions in the region around the 17th century. To pre-empt a potential conflict, in 1648, the Spanish Crown ceded the eastern bank of the Essequibo River to the Dutch Empire, thereby delineating a clear and natural boundary between the colonies of these two overseas powers.

In 1814, following nearly a century of pressures and disputes, the Netherlands, which had significantly diminished its colonial empire by that time, sold parts of its territories in Latin America to Great Britain. This transaction resulted in the formation of British Guiana, which encompassed the regions of Demerara, Berbice, and Essequibo. Subsequently, in 1834, British explorer Robert Schomburgk demarcated a boundary line that included an additional 80,000 km² west of the riverbed within London's possessions. This prompted Venezuela (having gained independence from Spain by then) to contest the alteration of the boundary line, viewing it as a provocative act. This naturally led to heightened tensions in the region, culminating in Washington's intervention alongside the Venezuelan government in 1895, based on the Monroe Doctrine. To resolve the dispute, an international arbitration tribunal was established in Paris in 1899, which awarded the majority of the contested area to the British Empire. Caracas did not recognize the ruling and continued to express its dissent, yet it was unable to achieve any modification of the arbitration decision.



Figure 9. Flag of Co-operative Republic of Guyana

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, the Essequibo issue remained relatively dormant, partly due to geopolitical priorities linked to global conflicts. However, during the 1930s and 1940s, Venezuelan academics and diplomats began compiling documents that questioned the legitimacy of the 1899 arbitration, arguing that both the British and U.S. governments had manipulated the judgment to exclude Venezuela from negotiations. These revelations, coupled with Venezuela's increasing desire to reassess its borders within a new

international and economic context, prompted Caracas to officially reopen the dispute in 1949, marking the beginning of a new phase in diplomatic contention.



Figure 10. Flag of Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

The situation maintained a precarious diplomatic balance until 1966, when London signed the Geneva Agreement with the Caracas government, recognizing the legitimacy of Venezuelan territorial claims and committing both parties (Venezuela and Guyana, as Britain would grant independence to the former South American colony three months later) to seek satisfactory solutions to resolve the dispute. The path pursued between 1982 and 1999 involved the "good offices" of the United Nations, although this approach proved to be largely ineffective.

During Hugo Chávez's presidency (1999-2013), the controversy was largely sidelined due to positive relations between Venezuela and Guyana. However, the discovery of significant oil reserves in the contested waters led to a new destabilization of the situation. In 2015, Venezuela denounced oil exploration activities conducted by Guyana in collaboration with international companies, claiming they violated Venezuelan territorial sovereignty. In December 2023, the situation further deteriorated when Nicolás Maduro's Venezuelan government held a referendum that overwhelmingly approved the unilateral annexation of Essequibo; although voter turnout was below expectations, Maduro leveraged the result to consolidate his internal power, accusing political opposition and major foreign investors of conspiring against Venezuelan sovereignty. Tensions between Guyana and Venezuela escalated further in 2024 when Venezuelan armed forces completed the construction of a post in the contested area of Ankoko Island, prompting an official protest from Guyana. The latter asserted that the construction violated international law and previous agreements. In January 2025, Georgetown publicly announced its intention to refer the matter to the International Court of Justice to counter Caracas's proposal to appoint a governor for the contested Essequibo region, stating that if Venezuela proceeded with this election, Guyana planned to formally request provisional measures aimed at halting such provocations.

Current Situation

The dispute over the Essequibo region is fundamentally a matter of territorial sovereignty and national identity for both parties involved. For Guyana, the Essequibo constitutes two-thirds of its national territory, making it a crucial element for its territorial integrity. Conversely, for Venezuela, claims over this region serve as a source of internal cohesion and legitimization of power. The referendum held in December 2023 significantly contributed to consolidating domestic support amidst severe economic difficulties, allowing President Maduro to leverage nationalism and divert public attention from the ongoing social crisis.

From an economic perspective, the Essequibo region is highly strategic due to its abundance of natural resources, including oil, gold, diamonds, and rare earth elements. The discovery of offshore oil reserves in 2015 has fundamentally transformed Guyana's economy; the Stabroek block, operated by ExxonMobil, has led to a rapid increase in oil production, positioning this small state among the major oil producers in Latin America. Consequently, Guyana recorded a GDP growth of 40% in 2020 and 62.3% in 2022.

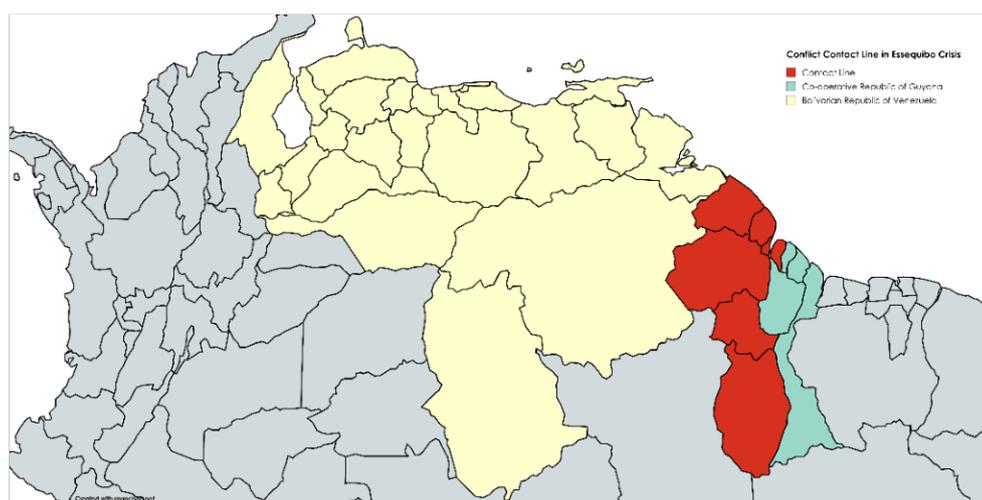


Figure 11. Conflict contacts line

In December 2023, coinciding with the unilateral annexation referendum, the Venezuelan government announced its intention to exploit the region's resources through state-owned enterprises such as PDVSA (Petróleos de Venezuela S.A.) and CVG (Corporación Venezolana de Guayana). This move aims to boost Venezuelan revenues and counter the influence of Western multinational corporations in the area. A similar strategy is observed regarding the extraction of mineral resources and the exploitation of Essequibo's agricultural potential, which would offer new economic development opportunities while reducing Venezuela's dependence on food imports.

The geographical position of the Essequibo region significantly enhances its strategic relevance. Control over this area ensures access to the Atlantic Ocean and international trade routes, alleviating pressure on the Caribbean Sea and expanding both nations' commercial and military pathways. In this context, the presence

of energy resources in the region has attracted the interest of international actors such as the United States, Russia, and China, contributing to heightened geopolitical tensions in the area.

Beyond the Borders

Federative Republic of Brazil

Under the leadership of President Da Silva, Brazil has adopted a diplomatic stance aimed at promoting regional stability, expressing concern over the unilateral actions of Caracas and urging moderation and dialogue. Furthermore, within the institutional frameworks of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), Brazil has taken on the role of mediator between Guyana and Venezuela, organizing an initial negotiation table in December 2023 in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, during which both parties agreed to refrain from using force and to resolve their dispute in accordance with international law.

Brasilia is closely monitoring developments in the Essequibo region, as any potential military escalation could destabilize the entire Amazon region, with possible repercussions for Brazilian border security. To mitigate such risks, Brazil has bolstered its military presence along the border with Venezuela, deploying armoured vehicles and additional troops in the Roraima region to secure the frontier and deter any aggressive actions. In this context, Defence Minister José Múcio stated that Brazil will not permit its territory to be used for Venezuelan military operations against Guyana under any circumstances, emphasizing the country's commitment to maintaining peace and regional security. Consequently, it is reasonable to expect that Brazil will continue to play a mediating role in the Essequibo crisis.

People's Republic of China

In recent years, China has invested significant capital in Latin America and the Caribbean, particularly focusing on natural resources. The Essequibo region, known for its oil and mineral reserves, represents an area of immense strategic interest for Beijing. With the discovery of new oil reserves, many Chinese companies already operating in the region have sought opportunities to invest, aiming to diversify energy supply sources to support their growing domestic demand.

Consequently, China has maintained stable diplomatic relations with both Guyana and Venezuela, adopting a neutral stance regarding the Essequibo dispute. Beijing has provided economic and technical support (including military assistance through the sale of K-8W aircraft now used by the Venezuelan Air Force) to Caracas, thereby helping to sustain Maduro's government, especially in light of increasing international sanctions. Simultaneously, China has recognized the strategic importance of the region and the economic opportunities it presents for Guyana, investing in infrastructure projects and seeking to strengthen bilateral cooperation with Georgetown.

However, the escalating tensions between Guyana and Venezuela pose a challenge to China's neutrality, as an open conflict would necessitate alignment with one side or the other, jeopardizing existing investments. For

this reason, the international community (particularly the United States) closely monitors China's actions. Beijing has consistently upheld the principle of non-interference in other countries' internal affairs; however, its growing economic and political presence in Latin America complicates its ability to maintain a completely detached position.

Russian Federation

Russia has expressed interest in the Essequibo dispute, advocating for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. In December 2023, during a phone call with Venezuelan President Maduro, Russian President Putin emphasized the importance of resolving the territorial dispute between Venezuela and Guyana through political and diplomatic means. Additionally, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova stated that Russia is closely monitoring the situation in Essequibo, particularly in light of the consultative referendum held in December 2023. Zakharova highlighted the necessity for a peaceful and consensual solution, urging both parties to respect international law stemming from existing bilateral agreements. In her statement, she also warned foreign powers against intervening in the dispute to prevent Latin America from becoming a war zone.

Although there is no concrete evidence of direct economic investments by Russia in the Essequibo region, Russia's involvement in Venezuela remains significant. In recent years, Moscow has reportedly strengthened military cooperation with Venezuela, supplying Caracas with S-300 air defence systems and Tu-160 strategic bombers, officially for joint training missions. These relations should be interpreted as part of a broader strategy to increase Russia's presence in the Western Hemisphere and as a response to U.S. activities in the Caribbean, demonstrating Moscow's capability to project military power within America's "backyard." The stance of President Trump on this matter remains to be seen.

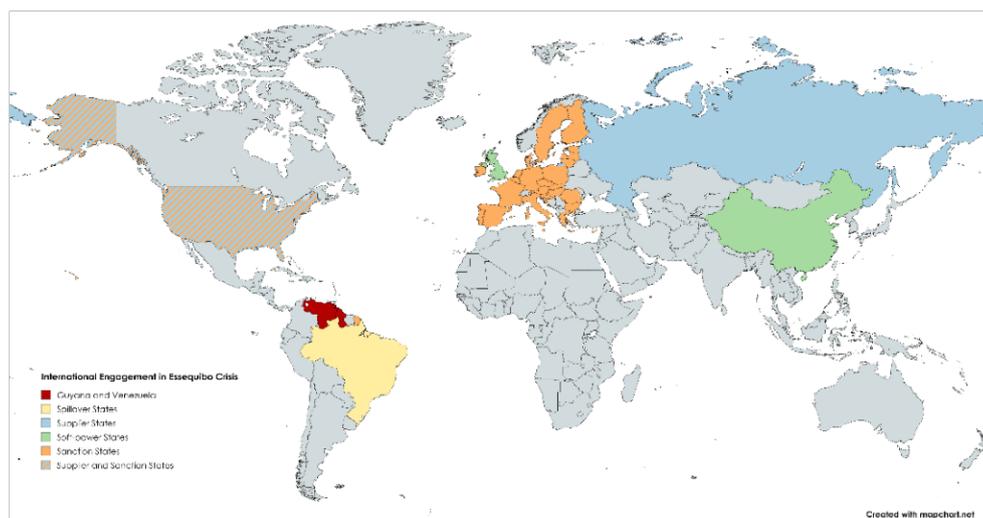


Figure 12. International Engagement in Essequibo Crisis

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

The United Kingdom, historically deeply involved in the Essequibo territorial dispute, has maintained an interest in the stability of Guyana, particularly concerning relations within the Commonwealth. In this context,

London supports Guyana's efforts to resolve the dispute through legal and diplomatic means. For instance, during the G7 Foreign Ministers' meeting held in Capri in April 2024, a communiqué emphasized the importance of peacefully resolving territorial disputes and respecting international law. Although the statement did not specifically mention the Essequibo dispute and was influenced by considerations regarding the war in Ukraine and events in Gaza, the UK reiterated its commitment to the stability and security of the South American region.

From an economic perspective, London has significant interests, particularly in the energy sector. While British companies have not been at the forefront of exploiting oil reserves off the coast of Essequibo, regional stability is crucial for the UK's strategic interests, as any armed conflict would adversely affect international energy market relations. Furthermore, London collaborates with Georgetown in defence matters, providing assistance in training special forces and promoting maritime security cooperation. This does not only enhance Guyana's capacity to protect its borders and territorial waters, but it also grants the UK political and military leverage should intervention become necessary.

United States of America

In the context of the Essequibo crisis, the United States has repeatedly expressed support for Guyana, recognizing the legitimacy of its territorial claims and backing its legal initiatives at the International Court of Justice. Considering Washington's tendency to intervene in the affairs of states it considers its "backyard," this support can be interpreted as a response to both Russian support for Venezuela and growing Chinese interests in the region. This hypothesis is supported by joint military exercises between the United States and Guyana in December 2023, seen as both an unconditional endorsement of Georgetown and a direct provocation to Caracas. Washington aims to strengthen a regional ally, also because Guyanese ports such as Georgetown, New Amsterdam, and Bartica (strategically located on the Essequibo River) secure trade and military routes in the South Atlantic, ensuring greater control over the Antarctic continent.

The discovery of vast oil fields in the Stabroek block off the coast of Essequibo has attracted the interest of numerous American oil companies, most notably ExxonMobil, which invested billions of dollars in the exploration and exploitation of these deposits between 2015 and 2024. The presence of a large American multinational strengthens economic ties between Washington and Georgetown, creating shared interests in the region's stability. Furthermore, American investments in the Guyanese energy sector ensure an alternative source of oil supply, diversifying energy routes and reducing dependence on more unstable regions such as the Middle East.

International Community

The territorial dispute between Venezuela and Guyana over the Essequibo region has garnered significant attention from the international community, with various organizations adopting differing stances. The European Union, for instance, has expressed concern regarding the situation and has implemented targeted sanctions against Venezuelan officials deemed responsible for human rights violations within Venezuela's borders. While these sanctions are not directly linked to the Essequibo dispute, they reflect the EU's critical

position towards the Maduro government, alongside its support for a peaceful resolution grounded in international law.

Similarly, the United Nations and the Organization of American States (OAS) advocate for a legal and peaceful resolution to the dispute, urging both parties to adhere to the decisions of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). However, the recognition of Maduro's government complicates the establishment of a unified stance on this issue.

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM), which includes Guyana as a member, has shown solidarity with Guyana, affirming its right to pursue a legal resolution through the ICJ and emphasizing that the territorial integrity of its members is paramount alongside respect for international law. Conversely, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), an organization supported by Caracas, has generally backed Venezuela's position without taking concrete actions against Guyana, stressing instead the necessity of bilateral agreements.

Conclusions

The dispute over the Essequibo region continues to represent one of the most complex and significant territorial issues in Latin America, as its implications extend beyond Guyana and Venezuela, potentially undermining the already delicate geopolitical balance of the continent. Consequently, although recent developments have heightened risk of further tensions, the international community, led by Brazil, appears fully committed to fostering dialogue and preventing military escalation.

Future prospects will largely depend on the ability of Caracas and Georgetown to find sustainable long-term diplomatic solutions, possibly by strengthening the role of the ICJ or other multilateral international bodies. At the same time, the interest of major actors such as China, Russia, and United States may influence the evolution of the dispute, necessitating a careful balancing act between global economic demands and regional stability.

In an optimistic scenario, a peaceful resolution to the dispute could pave the way for new opportunities for cooperation between the parties, transforming Essequibo from a battleground into a development engine for both Guyana and Venezuela. However, for this to occur, it is essential that the political leaderships of both countries set aside nationalist rhetoric and work concretely towards a shared solution, thereby avoiding the risk of the contention escalating into an unpredictable conflict.

The Civil War in Central African Republic

The Central African Republic (CAR) has been plagued by severe political instability since its independence from France in 1960. The civil war that has ravaged the country for decades is the result of a combination of historical and geopolitical factors rooted in ethnic and religious tensions, which have led to the marginalisation of various communities and minorities, as well as the proliferation of armed groups. French colonization left behind a fragmented society embedded in an underdeveloped economy, inevitably producing an unstable political system characterized by successive authoritarian regimes punctuated by military coups.

Recently, one of the key events contributing to the rapid escalation in recent years was the rise to power of François Bozizé in 2003 following a coup. He established a regime marked by clientelist management of power, distributing position among his relatives and loyalists while suppressing opposition. The political and economic marginalisation of the northern regions of the country, predominantly Muslim, led to intense phase of armed insurgency between 2004 and 2007, with the emergence of various rebel groups such as the Union des Forces Démocratiques pour la Rassemblement (UFDR) and the Armée Populaire pour la Restauration de la Démocratie (APRD). In an attempt to quell the uprising, Bozizé negotiated a series of peace agreements, including the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2008), which provided for integration of some rebel groups into the regular armed forces and the formation of a national unity government. However, Bozizé never honoured its commitments, and growing distrust in the central authority led various armed groups to reorganise.



Figure 13. Flag of Central African Republic

In 2012 an alliance of predominantly Muslim rebel groups known as Séléka launched a revolt against the Bozizé government, accusing it of failing to respect previous peace agreements. The conflict rapidly escalated, and in March 2013, the rebels captured the capital Bangui, forcing Bozizé to flee to Cameroon and leading to the unilateral proclamation of Michel Djotodia, leader of Séléka, as president. However, his inability to control the militias led to further escalation of violence, and in response, several anti-Balaka groups composed mainly

of Christians and animists emerged, engaging in fierce clashes with Séléka and committing reprisals against the Muslim population in general, transforming the conflict into a sectarian war.

In the face of increasing violence, the international community intervened in an attempt to stabilise the situation: in December 2013, France, supported by the African Union, launched Operation Sangaris, and a few months later the UN initiated the MINUSCA mission, which still operates in the region today. Despite these efforts, however, the conflict has continued, and violence between Séléka and anti-Balaka has not ceased. The 2016 elections, supported by the MINUSCA mission, brought Faustin-Archange Touadéra to the presidency, but the government struggled to regain control over vast areas of the country. By 2020, the conflict had intensified further with the creation of Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC), an alliance of rebel groups that attempted to overthrow the Touadéra government. The intervention of Russian and Rwandan troops in support of the national army contributed to halting the CPC's advance, but the situation remains uncertain.

Current Situation

Since 2022, the Central African Republic has experienced a period of relative stability in terms of armed escalation, despite persistent internal government tensions and daily security threats. President Touadéra has sought to consolidate his power through a series of authoritarian reforms, culminating in a proposed constitutional revision in 2023 to allow for indefinite presidential re-election. However political fragmentation continues to hinder the country's governance: few opposition figures not involved in the complex web of corruption report a growing limitation of democratic spaces, with episodes of repression against dissidents and journalists; local elections, long awaited, have been repeatedly postponed, and the presence of armed groups (both regular and irregular) outside government control further fuels civilian discontent and distances hopes for peace policies.

Armed clashes are primarily concentrated in the northern and central regions of the country, where rebel groups like CPC continue challenging government control: the provinces of Vakaga, Bamingui-Bangoran, Nana-Grébizi e Ouaka remain the main epicentres of violence, with targeted attacks on regular army posts and incursions into inhabited centres causing numerous civilian casualties; in the south-west, the conflict has also involved the Lobaye region, albeit to a lesser extent. Strategic cities like Bria and Bambari are often the scene of fighting, and the roads connecting the capital Bangui to the country's main regions remain insecure, with frequent armed assaults and roadblocks. This situation severely limits trade and access to humanitarian aid, further exacerbating the humanitarian crisis and vulnerability of local populations.

The civil war is severely compromising the country's economy, which was already one of the most fragile in the world before the conflict. The Central African Republic's GDP growth has been substantially nil (0.5-1%), hindered by ongoing insecurity and the reduced capacity of the central administration to manage resources and investments: key sectors such as agriculture and mining have been affected by the activities of rebel armed groups that impose illegal taxes and control parts of the production chains; moreover, extraction facilities not subject to such internal extortion are nonetheless in the hands of large sectoral multinationals that exploits the

workforce and resources. Additionally, systemic corruption and the weakness of economic institutions have further prevented structural and uniform growth in the country: although successive coup governments have repeatedly announced development plans and incentives for local business, political instability and the lack of adequate infrastructure have limited their implementation and effectiveness.

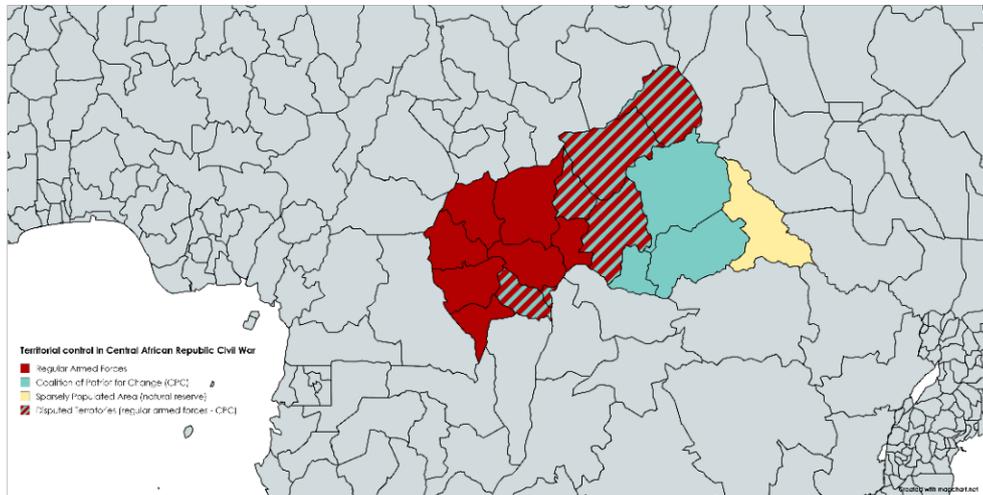


Figure 14. Territorial control in Central African Republic Civil War

The social impact of the current political and economic conditions has led to the displacement of more than a quarter of the population from their homes, with millions living in extreme poverty. Humanitarian organisations report a significant increase in child malnutrition and reduced access to essential services such as healthcare and education: on the one hand, the healthcare system is being severely tested by ongoing armed incursions, localized epidemics, and the exodus of qualified medical personnel; on the other, many schools, particularly female institutions, have been destroyed or transformed into armed groups headquarters, forcing children and young people to grow up in an environment devoid of opportunity and where phenomena of radicalization and child recruitment are not uncommon.

Beyond the Borders

French Republic

The influence of France in the Central African Republic is a direct result of the neocolonial policies that Paris has maintained towards its former African colonies through the system of “Françafrique”, even after granting independence in 1960. For decades, France has exercised political and economic control over the country. The most significant recent French military intervention in CAR was the 2013 Operation Sangaris, launched in response to growing violence between Séléka militias and anti-Balaka groups. This operation, conducted with the support of the United Nations and the African Union, aimed to stabilise the country, and protect the civilian population. However, despite initial containment of violence, the mission faces numerous challenges, and the withdrawal of French troops in 2016 left the country in a state of persistent instability.

Following the failure of Operation Sangaris, France maintained a limited presence through military training missions and logistical support to Central African armed forces. However, the deterioration of the political situation and the local government's inability to ensure security rendered the French strategy ineffective. Growing distrust of the former colonial power's military presence fuelled anti-French sentiments among the population, who perceived Paris's interventions as neocolonial interface rather than a stabilisation effort. Protests against the French presence intensified between 2020 and 2021, often accompanied by violent incidents against French embassies in Bangui. The perception of military and political failure led the Touadéra government to seek new alliances; in 2022, France announced the definitive withdrawal of its troops, marking a crucial turning point in regional geopolitics.

With France's exit, the Central African government intensified cooperation with Russia, allowing the Wagner Group to assume a preponderant role in national security. The loss of French military influence dealt a severe blow to its entire regional strategy, highlighting the failure of intervention policies in the Sahel and Central African. Diplomatically, relations between Paris and Bangui further deteriorated, with the Central African government accusing France of abandoning the country at a critical moment.

People's Republic of China

In recent years, China has significantly consolidated its presence in the Central African Republic through a soft power strategy, contrasting with the more interventionist approaches of Western and Russian actors. Beijing has pursued an economic growth in partner countries to secure access to natural resources like gold, diamond, and uranium. Unlike former colonial powers, China has not imposed political conditions on its investments, making it an attractive partner for Bangui, which has welcomed funding for road, bridge, and critical infrastructure construction essential for the country's economic development.

One sector where China has strengthened its presence is mining, with Chinese companies acquiring concessions for gold and rare earth extraction helping modernise an industry historically dominated by informal economies and armed groups. However, the lack of effective government control has often generated tensions with local communities, who complain about the failure of Chinese companies to adhere to environmental and labour regulations. China has also shown interest in the energy sector, particularly hydroelectric power, by financing feasibility studies for dams' construction all over the country but these projects are still in the preliminary phase and require a more stable political environment to be successfully implemented (conditions that do not seem to be emerging in the short term).

A distinctive feature of China's approach in CAR is its political neutrality. Unlike France and other Western powers, China has avoided openly taking sides in the civil conflict, preferring to maintain diplomatic relations with all actors involved and avoiding direct friction with local factions. However, China's growing influence in the country has not gone unnoticed by other international actors involved: Russia, initially through the paramilitary Wagner Group, has strengthened its presence in the Central African Republic, creating a new balance of power that could lead to political tensions with its Chinese ally.

Despite these developments, China's strategy in Africa is often criticised for its "debt trap diplomacy", where unsustainable loans are provided in exchange for strategic assets like natural resources and infrastructures. This approach has raised concerns about China's influence on African political will and its control over vital resources, not only in CAR. Nonetheless, China remains the largest economic partner for Africa, investing heavily in infrastructure projects and providing significant financial support, which has contributed to economic growth in many African countries.

Republic of Cameroon

Bilateral relations between the Central African Republic and Cameroon have historically been marked by fluctuations, alternating between periods of cooperation and episodes of tension along their shared border. Following the fall of Bozizé's regime and the subsequent rise of the Séléka coalition, Cameroon was compelled to enhance its border surveillance to mitigate the repercussions of CAR's internal conflict. Between 2019 and 2020, as President Touadéra's government intensified military operations against rebel groups, numerous combatants from the Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC) and the Popular Front for the Rebirth of Central Africa (FPRC) sought refuge in northern Cameroon. Yaoundé reported incidents of looting, indiscriminate violence, and mass sexual assaults perpetrated by these groups. In response, targeted military operations were launched; however, the heterogeneous nature of these incursions has rendered containment efforts exceedingly challenging.

The CAR crisis has also had profound economic repercussions for Cameroon, particularly in terms of cross-border trade. The closure of certain trade routes has significantly curtailed exchanges between the two nations, adversely affecting key sectors such as agriculture and livestock. This disruption has further deterred foreign investors from funding projects in border regions due to fears of conflict spillover, a concern that overlooks Cameroon's internal stability. Additionally, the influx of Central African refugees has placed considerable strain on Cameroon's resources. According to data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), over 350,000 refugees were hosted in Cameroon as of 2023, with many concentrated in its eastern regions. This situation has necessitated substantial international assistance, which often proves insufficient, particularly given recurring tensions between local populations and refugee communities.

Republic of Chad

The Chad has historically exerted considerable influence over the Central African Republic due to geographical proximity and intertwined political and military relations. Since the early 2000s, N'Djamena has played a crucial role in supporting regime changes in CAR, providing economic and military backing to Bozizé in 2003 and later to the Séléka coalition that ousted him. In 2016, Chad supported Touadéra's seizure of power, considering him more beneficial to its strategic interests. However, with Russia's increasing involvement, Chad's role has become more complicated, leading to a deterioration in bilateral relations.

One of the most critical incidents occurred in May 2021 when Central African forces, supported by Wagner Group mercenaries, crossed the borders during an operation against rebel groups. This incursion resulted in repeated firefights with the regular Chadian army, causing the deaths of at least six soldiers, including two captured and subsequently executed. This event sparked a severe diplomatic incident, with Chad accusing CAR

of unjustified aggression and threatening military retaliation. Bangui downplayed the incident, claiming it was unintentional and due to confusion with the rebels. N'Djamena interpreted the event as a signal of growing instability in the region, directly linked to Russia's increasing influence in CAR, which is progressively undermining the traditional balance of power.

Strategically, the current situation poses a significant problem for Chad, which views CAR as a vital buffer zone for its national security. Chad's primary concern is that the conflict could spill over its borders, further destabilising its territory. Moreover, Russia's growing influence threatens to undermine Chad's traditional role as a mediator and guarantor of regional stability. The presence of Wagner Group mercenaries not only reduces Chad's manoeuvrability in CAR's internal dynamics but also represents a potential direct threat to its security, as many observers believe Russia may use CAR as a base to expand its influence in the Sahel.

Beyond military clashes, the crisis in CAR has had a significant humanitarian impact. Similar to Cameroon, the civil war has triggered a massive influx of refugees into Chadian territory, exacerbating an already fragile humanitarian situation. According to the UNHCR, between 2023 and 2024, over 120.000 Central African refugees crossed into Chad, mainly concentrating in Mandoul and Logone Oriental regions. This has created tensions with local communities, who are already impoverished and lack adequate infrastructure to manage such a large number of individuals.

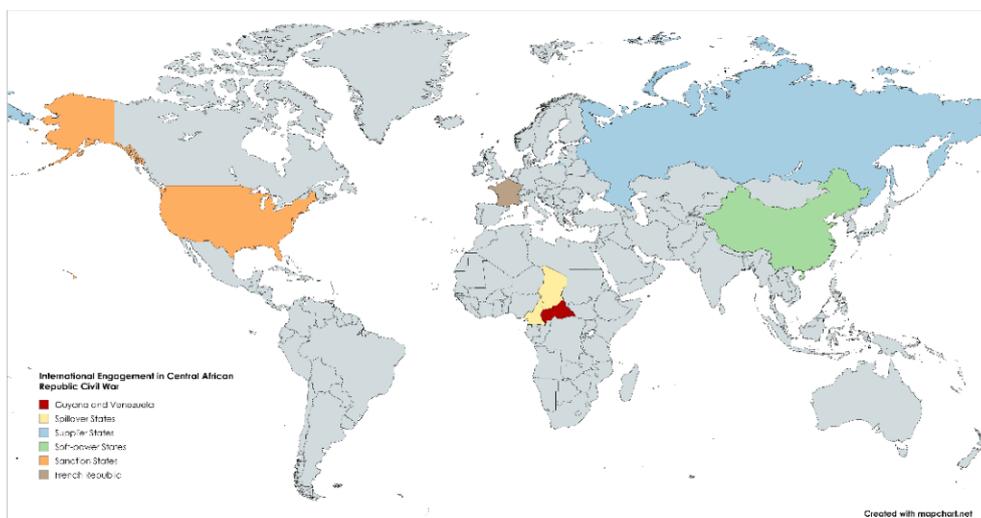


Figure 15. International Engagement in Central African Republic Civil War

Russian Federation

In recent years, Russia has intensified its presence in the Central African Republic, emerging as a key player in military support, economic cooperation, and political influence. This has significant implications for both the internal dynamics of the conflict and the geopolitical balances in the region. Moscow began providing assistance to President Touadéra in 2017, following the UN Security Council's approval to send light arms and ammunitions to CAR's armed forces. Concurrently, Russia initiated a unilateral initiative by sending military instructors and strategic observers, marking the beginning of a cooperation that would expand over the years.

A central element of Russian involvement in the CAR is the Wagner Group, which has been instrumental in repelling rebel offensives and securing the capital, Bangui. However, numerous international organisations have denounced severe human rights violations attributed to Russian mercenaries, including summary executions, torture, and abuse against civilians. In March 2021, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights discussed a report detailing cases of excessive force and indiscriminate killings by the Wagner Group. More recently, in February 2025, accusations emerged regarding the disappearance of two Central African soldiers, allegedly kidnapped by Russian mercenaries, sparking protests and highlighting the group's violent conduct.

Russia has leveraged its presence in the CAR to expand its political influence in the country and the Sahel region. Through a combination of military assistance and economic cooperation, particularly in the mining sector, Moscow has strengthened ties with the Touadéra government, consolidating itself as a privileged partner for Bangui. This includes financing pro-Russian local media and cultural programs to gain favour with the local population and promote a positive narrative about Russian presence. The Kremlin's strategy in the CAR fits into a broader framework of power projection across Africa, using the "regime survival package" model (successfully applied in Mali and Burkina Faso) to establish alliances with local governments in exchange for military support and security.

International Community

The United States has maintained a relatively marginal role in the Central African crisis, primarily adopting diplomatic and humanitarian measures. Initially, Washington sought to counter Russian influence in the region by deploying private security companies. However, with the intensification of the Wagner Group's presence starting in 2018, the U.S. administration opted for a more conservative strategy, exerting diplomatic pressure and implementing economic sanctions on the Touadéra government to diversify its security partners. Despite these political efforts, the significant disparity in deployed troops compared to the Russian adversary has undermined the success of the American strategy.

On the other hand, the European Union has played a much more active role in managing the Central African crisis, combining military interventions with humanitarian assistance. In 2014, the EU launched the EUFOR-RCA military operation, aiming to stabilise the situation in Bangui and create a secure environment for humanitarian operations. This mission, predominantly composed of Estonian and Georgian units, represents a concrete commitment by Europe as a whole (transcending the "boundaries" of the Union) to promote peace and security, which underpins the respect for the minimum core content of universal human rights in the region.

Finally, the African Union, more directly involved, plays a crucial role in attempting to mediate for lasting peace and stabilise the Central African Republic. Since the outbreak of hostilities, the AU has suspended Bangui in response to the initial coups and collaborated with the United Nations within the framework of the MINUSCA mission, emphasising the importance of respecting the constitutional order and highlighting the importance of a multilateral approach in managing internal African crises.

Conclusions

The Central African Republic, marked by years of conflict and political instability, currently faces a dire situation. Estimates indicate that over half of the approximately 4.7 million inhabitants rely on humanitarian aid for survival. The combination of ongoing conflicts, endemic poverty, and natural disasters has led to widespread food insecurity and has undermined an already fragile healthcare system: acute malnutrition is on the rise, and access to clean water and medications remains severely limited, particularly in rural areas and regions most affected by conflict. Furthermore, violence has forced approximately 1.5 million individuals to flee their homes, both as internally displaced persons and as refugees in neighbouring countries, exacerbating community vulnerabilities and hindering access to essential services.

In this context, the United States MINUSCA mission remains a key actor in stabilising the country. The mission's mandate, which has been extended multiple times by the UN Security Council, includes civilian protection, support for the political process, peace consolidation, and human rights monitoring. However, the mission's effectiveness is often questioned due to persistent insecurity, limited operational capacity in certain areas of the country, and allegations of abuses by some of its members, as reports by Human Rights Watch.

In the coming years, CAR will face several critical challenges, including strengthening state institutions, combating corruption, and promoting the rule of law to ensure effective and accountable governance. This must be done while distancing itself from constitutional reforms proposed by President Touadéra that aim to remove term limits for presidential mandates. The success of the peace process will depend on the government's ability to initiate an inclusive dialogue with all political and social actors, including armed groups. In this regard, the implementation of the 2019 Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic remains fundamental but requires a concrete commitment from all parties involved.

CAR is situated at the centre of a complex geopolitical competition among various external actors, necessitating skilful management of diplomatic dynamics to avoid compromising its sovereignty and exacerbating regional tensions. In this context, the presence of Wagner Group raises serious concerns regarding human rights compliance and national stability. It is plausible to expect that Bangui will have no choice but to continue strengthening its armed forces and security apparatus to ensure civilian protection and territorial control, even with support from the international community.

The Growing Tension in the Philippines

Following its independence from the United States in 1946, the Philippines encountered considerable challenges pertaining to national integration and economic development. During this period, the southern regions, predominantly inhabited by Muslims, experiences neglect as resources were toward more densely populated areas. This marginalisation led to the emergence of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) as the primary separatist group in the 1970s. The central government entered into negotiation with the MNLF, resulting in the 1976 Tripoli Agreement, which aimed to establish an autonomous Muslim region. However, the implementation of this agreement faced obstacles, and internal disagreements regarding peace processes and autonomy led to a splintering of the MNLF, with the more radical faction forming the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), led by Salamat Hashim, with the goal of establishing an independent Islamic state in the southern Philippines. It is important to note that tensions between the central government and liberation movements were never fully resolved, even with failed attempt to establish an Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (1996) or the actual creation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region (2014).

In 1991, further fragmentation within the separatist movement led to the formation of the Abu Sayyaf group. Under the leadership of former military officer Abdurajik Abubakar Janjalani, who had been deployed to Afghanistan in 1980s, the group adopted extremely violent tactics executed with precision and strategy, suggesting military training. From its inceptions, Abu Sayyaf demonstrated links to international terrorist organisation, particularly al-Qaeda, which, according to reports from U.S. intelligence, allegedly financed the group through Mohammed Jamal Khalifa, Osama bin Laden's brother-in-law. There reports also suggest that al-Qaeda terrorist Ramzi Yousef, a planner of the 1993 World Trade Centre bombing and the Bojinka Project (1995), received training in the Philippines from Abu Sayyaf and Janjalani himself, under bin Laden's direction.

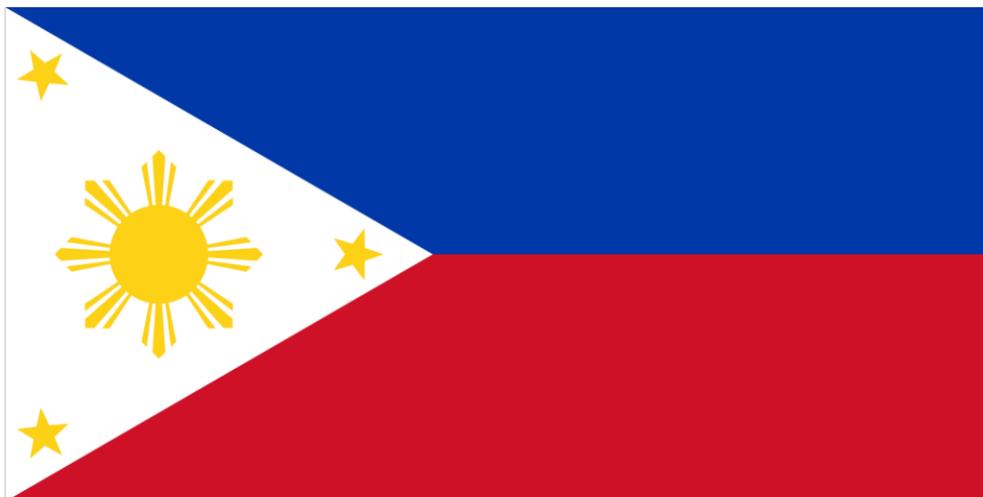


Figure 16. Flag of Republic of Philippines

Regarding domestic politics, the Philippines has been significantly influenced by the Marcos family, starting with Ferdinand Marcos, who served as president from 1965 to 1986. Marcos transformed the country into an authoritarian state and imposed martial law in 1972 under the pretext of combating the communist threat. During his regime, power was concentrated within his family and loyal allies, while the opposition faces violent repression, and corruption was widespread. However, following the regime's collapse due to the 1986 People Power Revolution, the Marcos family rehabilitated itself in the political landscape, partly through the extensive patronage network maintained by Imelda Marcos, Ferdinand Marcos's wife. The true political resurgence of the family, however, was led by the son of the Philippine dictator, Ferdinand "BongBong" Marcos Jr., who, through a meticulous public disinformation operation via social media, managed to construct a narrative that minimalizes the atrocities of his father's regime, and his election as president in 2022 represents the success of his strategy to regain power.

Current Situation

Despite the 2014 peace agreement between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), tensions persist, as evidenced by a November 2024 ambush attributed to MILF members in Basilan province that resulted in the deaths of two soldiers and injuries to twelve others who were protecting a United Nations Development Programme project. Beyond these insurgencies, territorial disputes among criminal gangs exacerbate regional instability. In January 2025, a conflict between clans of two Muslim guerrilla commanders in Maguindanao del Sur led to at least 14 fatalities over a dispute involving 290 hectares of agricultural land, highlighting how internal rivalries can quickly escalate into significant violence.

In addition to criminal violence, which is linked to the pervasive drug market, the Philippines faces a persistent terrorist threat, primarily attributed to the Abu Sayyaf group, an affiliate of al-Qaeda and ISIS. In terms of casualties, the most devastating attack occurred on August 24, 2020, in Jolo, Sulu province, causing 28 deaths and 150 injuries. More recently, the cities of Insulan (April 17, 2023), Marawi (December 3, 2023) and Cotabato City (May 19, 2024) have been targeted. These attacks have demonstrated the terrorist group's resolve and operational capabilities, despite government efforts to curtail their threat. Such resilience underscores the need for integrated strategies combining military operations with socioeconomic development initiatives aimed at deradicalisation to address the roots of terrorism in the region.

Within this context, the Philippines has experienced increasing tension between President Marcos Jr. and Vice President Sara Duterte. Elected together in 2022 on a platform of national unity, their relationship has rapidly deteriorated due to disagreements over domestic policies and international affiliation, culminating in a critical juncture in November 2024. Vice President Duterte explicitly states that she had orchestrated the assassination of President Marcos Jr. and his family, which would be executed if anything were to happen to her. This declaration triggered widespread criticism and calls for impeachment, raising concerns about the country's democratic stability. Despite the pressure, President Marcos Jr. has dismissed the impeachment efforts as a waste of time, attempting to downplay the significance of the ongoing political crisis.

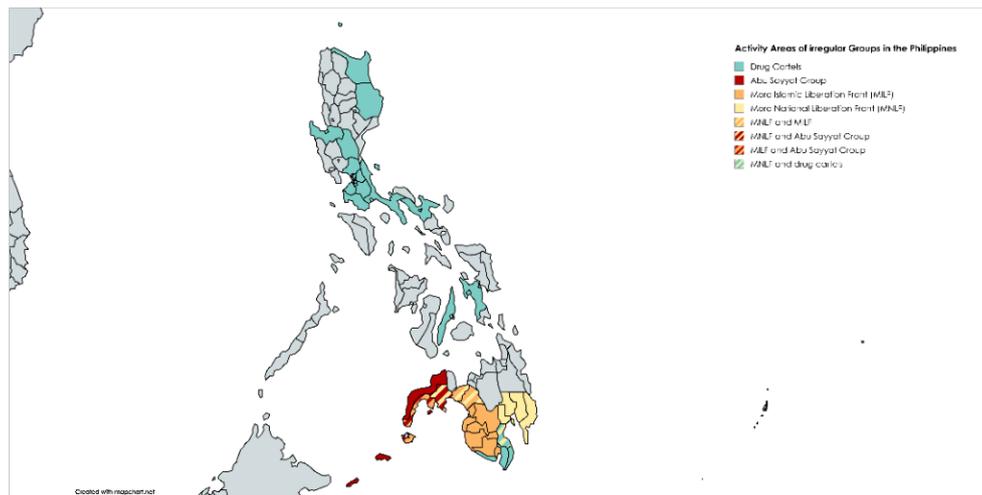


Figure 17. Activity areas of irregular groups

At the grassroots level, the presidency of Marcos Jr. has been marked by widespread protests, which began even before his inauguration. Progressive and opposition groups have demonstrated against the Marcos family’s legacy, which is accused of corruption and human rights violation during the martial law imposed by the current president’s father. Protests have also addressed issues such as alleged electoral fraud in the 2022 elections, the proliferation of fake news and historical distortion, and violation of fundamental rights related to the war on drugs and terrorism. Furthermore, the Vice President’s inflammatory statements and the corruption allegations have led to increasing demands for accountability and transparency from the civil society.

Beyond the Borders

Commonwealth of Australia

Australia recognises the Philippines not only as a strategic partner but also as a rapidly growing market. In recent years, Canberra has intensified trade exchanges and promoted investments in sectors crucial to the economic development of both parties, such as energy and technology, with the aim of reducing dependence on traditional supply sources. This long-term approach seeks regional economic integration and political stabilisation in an area subject to Chinese expansionist pressure. By developing strategic partners, Australia intends to establish a reciprocal relationship to strengthen its diplomatic influence in the Pacific and the South China Sea.

In this context, Canberra’s involvement in the Philippines’ internal politics is characterised by an active commitment to promoting transparent governance and democratic institutional reforms. This is facilitated through high-level summits, cooperation programs, and joint initiatives aimed at strengthening the institutional capacities of both countries. This integrated approach allows for aligning political objectives with regional security needs through the creation of multilateral coordination mechanism. Canberra has intensified its participation in military cooperation programs, joint exercises, and operates within a context of increasing geopolitical rivalry in the Asia-Pacific region. Australia’s strategic-military contribution involves pursuing a

model of international cooperation not aimed at an expansionist military presence, but rather at substantially containing Beijing's interests, ensuring the enhancement of the Philippines' defensive capabilities.

Japan

Similar to Australia, Japan views the Philippines as a strategic commercial partner. Economic agreements between Tokyo and Manila are primarily focused on critical infrastructure, advanced technologies, and the energy sector, with the aim of strengthening bilateral economic relations and contributing to the stabilisation of a crucial node in Southeast Asian trade routes. Beyond generating economic returns, these investments are designed as soft-power instruments to enhance cooperation between the countries by transferring technological know-how and fostering solutions that contribute to greater economic resilience in the Philippines, thereby reducing the impact of internal political turbulence.

From a political standpoint, Japan adopts an approach centred on reinforcing governance and promoting democratic institutional reforms in the Philippines. In response to the political-military crisis, the Japanese embassy and relevant ministries have intensified diplomatic exchanges and initiated numerous bilateral meetings with Philippine authorities. Tokyo is particularly interested in ensuring regional stability, as the archipelago's geographic position gives the Philippines undeniable strategic importance for the security of trade routes and for limiting Chinese influence. Specifically, security cooperation agreements include joint exercises, strategic information exchanges, and training programs for the Philippine armed forces, with the goal of creating an integrated emergency response system while reducing the risk of escalating the internal conflict.

People's Republic of China

China recognises the Philippines as a potential ally and key partner within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), aimed at consolidating trade links between mainland Asia and Southeast Asia. Chinese companies have actively financed and participated in the construction and modernisation of port infrastructures in the Philippines, fostering the development of logistics hubs that allow closer control of trade flows. China's participation in these projects is often contingent on granting control of commercial shipping routes within Philippine offshore national waters. From a political perspective, China's strategy in the Philippines is oriented toward projecting an image of strength and determination, capable of challenging international norms while maintaining a rhetoric that emphasises dialogue and regional cooperation. China has been able to use various instruments of soft power to justify its actions, all underlying the concept of "historical harmonisation" and the right to preserve its cultural heritage.

In this context, Beijing is pursuing a strategy of claiming almost the entire South China Sea based on historical narratives, despite the 2016 ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, which declared these claims unfounded. Ignoring this decision and strengthening its presence in the area, China is progressively militarising the entire region, pursuing a policy of passive aggression, manifested by the threatening use of the Chinese Coast Guard against Philippine commercial vessels in defence of those artificial islands that, according to intelligence reports, house military installation and secret nuclear sites, as in the case of the Spratly and Scarborough Shoal archipelagos. The aim of Beijing is to create a buffer zone that allows it

to monitor and control maritime and air traffic in disputed areas, both defensively (against the United States and its allies south of the South China Sea) and offensively (should it decide to declare war against Taiwan).

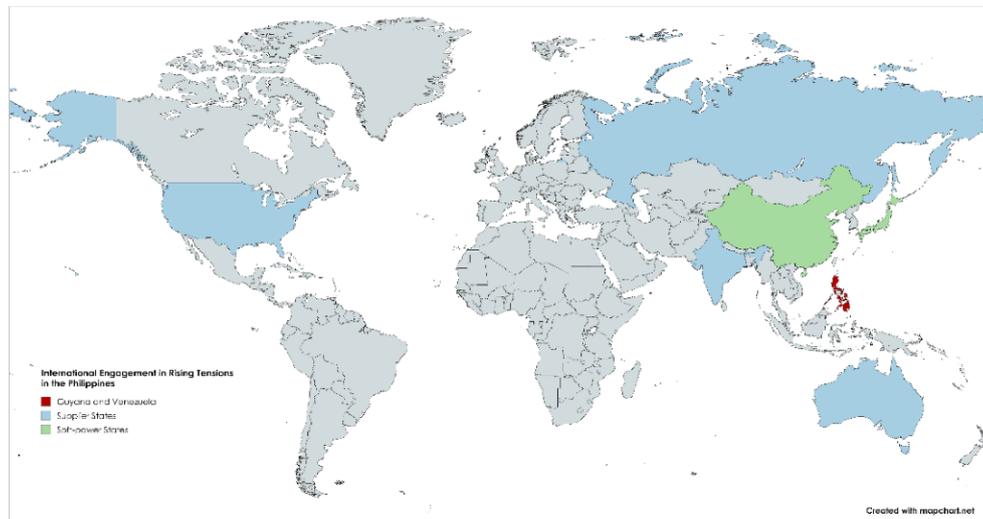


Figure 18. International Engagement in Rising Tensions in the Philippines

Republic of India

Bilateral relations between the Philippines and India are progressively intensifying, driven by the initiation of numerous joint projects in key sectors such as information technology and logistics. The trade agreements promoted by New Delhi aim to establish a framework of mutual interdependence designed to mitigate the economic vulnerability of the Philippines while addressing the increasing demands for energy and food security in the Indian subcontinent.

The economic integration highlights how New Delhi's "Act East" policy aligns closely with China's BRI, despite India's critical stance towards the latter. Officially, India prefers to allocate resources to partnership projects that respect local sovereignty and characteristics rather than engaging in what may be perceived as predatory investments. However, some analysts suggest that India's true motivations stem from a cautious view of China, fearing that Chinese influence could hinder its ability to forge economic partnerships within a continental dominance framework.

Strategically, the geographical positioning of the Philippines (and Indonesia) renders the archipelago an ideal gateway for trade between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. In this context, New Delhi has initiated a military partnership with Manila aimed at establishing a (nuclear) deterrent force to counter potential escalations in the region. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, this partnership seeks to monitor maritime activities in contested waters to safeguard commercial corridors.

United States of America

The United States has progressively consolidated its military and political presence in the Philippines through agreements such as the Mutual Defence Treaty (1951) and, more recently, the Enhance Defence Cooperation Agreement (2014), who have transformed Manila into a fundamental pillar of American Indo-

Pacific strategy. They do not only provide Washington with advanced military infrastructure in the Philippines, but they also strengthen communication and coordination channels between the two nations. Within this framework, the annual Balikatan exercise simulates both offensive and defensive responses to potential invasions from the coast, serving as a demonstration of strength aimed at deterring China, particularly concerning Taiwan.

The U.S. military presence in the Philippines is part of a broader “pivot to Asia” strategy, primarily aimed at ensuring that the region remains free and open to international trade while countering unilateral and authoritarian tendencies. Maintaining stability in maritime corridors does not only protect U.S. economic interests but it is also a key element for safeguarding American military power and preserving the geopolitical status quo. Diplomatically, Washington has repeatedly reaffirmed its commitment to support an international system based on law and national sovereignty, articulating its rhetoric around concepts such as “defending democracy” and “shared security”. This approach is clearly designed to strengthen the historical alliance with the Philippines and consolidate its positioning in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in the South China Sea.

However, recent developments indicate a significant increase in U.S. financial support for the Philippine military, including a commitment of 500 million U.S. dollars for Foreign Military Financing Program and an additional 128 million U.S. dollars through EDCA for expanding military facilities in the archipelago. This investment underscores a strategic pivot that aims to enhance Philippine defence capabilities amid ongoing tensions in the region, particularly with China asserting claims over contested maritime territories. The signing of new intelligence-sharing agreements further solidifies this military collaboration, reflecting a mutual interest in addressing common security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region.

International Community

The European Union is playing an active, albeit marginal, role in the international response to the crisis in the Philippines, basing its actions on principles of human rights promotion, democracy, and international cooperation. In addition to threatening sanctions against the central administration, the EU has implemented a series of initiatives aimed at supporting the Philippine government in reforming institutions and managing internal separatist tensions. Key measures adopted include the activation of financial and technical assistance programs designed to strengthen the capabilities of the Philippine judiciary and law enforcement agencies, with the goal of improving transparency, reducing corruption, and ensuring greater protections of civil rights.

The United Nations, particularly through the Human Rights Council, has expressed concern regarding repeated human rights violations, deliberate restrictions on freedom of expression, and episodes of violence rampant in the country. The UN system has adopted various resolutions and recommendations directed at Philippine authorities, establishing monitoring and investigation mechanism that document and denounce such violations, thereby providing essential informational support for international discourse.

ASEAN, for its part, has promoted dialogue and cooperation initiatives aimed at creating specific mechanisms for conflict prevention and internal crisis management. While not having adopted autonomous

sanction measures, these organisations have facilitated coordination among member states and supported humanitarian assistance and economic development programs in the context of the Philippine crisis. This contributes to the sharing of information and best practices to enhance the international community's capacity for timely and effective intervention.

Conclusions

The persistent disregard for human rights in the Philippines raises significant concerns, as evidenced by widespread protests against the legacy of the Marcos family, accused of corruption and political persecution. The so-called "war on drugs" has particularly exacerbated insecurity due to extrajudicial killings and a lack of transparency in police operations. In response to these allegations, former President Rodrigo Duterte was arrested on March 11, 2025, and transferred to The Hague at the request of the International Criminal Court. In addition to these issues, ethnic and religious minorities (especially in the southern regions) continue to face systemic discrimination and violence: these acts are perpetrated by both state-affiliate armed forces and clandestine groups; such patterns of abuse underscore the urgent need for accountability and reforms to uphold justice and human rights in the country.

Freedom of expression and press remains another major issue. Journalists and activists who criticise the government often face intimidation, threats, and violence. The proliferation of fake news and historical distortion undermines citizens' ability to make informed decisions and fully engage in democratic life. In this context, the political crisis between President Marcos Jr. and Vice President Duterte has further exacerbated tensions in the country, raising questions about institutional stability and adherence to the rule of law.

The future outlook is uncertain: the persistence of separatist insurgencies, terrorist threats, criminal violence, and internal political tensions present significant challenges that could irreparably destabilize the nation. However, an integrated approach combining economic and military support (under international oversight) could assist Manila in implementing policies aimed at religious deradicalisation and upholding national institutions. In this regard, the international community can play a vital role in supporting the efforts of the Philippine government, but it is crucial that actions are taken with caution and respect for the national sovereignty of a key player in the Indo-Pacific economy and geopolitical balance.

The Project – Appendix I

The Forgotten Wars project was initiated as a column on the “Real Clear – World” information website with a clear and ambitious objective: to shed light on conflicts overlooked by mainstream media. This endeavour does not aim to denounce covert censorship or allege conspiracies, but rather to acknowledge an inevitable reality: the news flow we receive is the product of editorial choices, prioritised media coverage needs, and, at times, logistical and operational constraints.

In the current era, with public access to instantaneous mass communication tools and the presence of numerous freelance journalists in the field, we find ourselves in a privileged position to address these information gaps and report on wars that, while not featured in major newspaper headlines, significantly impact the lives of millions. The project is situated precisely within this context, aiming to provide in-depth and accessible information, avoiding sensationalism, and focusing on the substance of facts.

Neglected wars are numerous and unfold in corners of the world that rarely appear in television news or on newspaper front pages. Civil wars, ethnic conflicts, struggles for resource control, and stories of populations balancing between violence and survival: Forgotten Wars does not merely seek to enumerate these conflicts, but to recount them with an analytical and narrative approach, delving into their historical causes, internal dynamics, and long-term consequences.

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The Author – Appendix II

Matteo Balzarini Zane is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Government Sciences and Public Policies at the University of Padua, Italy. He graduated in 2023 with a degree in Political Sciences, International Relations, and Human Rights from the same institution. Balzarini Zane collaborates as a Project Manager with Michele Civiero and Manuel Pala for the organisation of the Euro-Mediterranean project Across the Sea: Our Bond to the Mediterranean. This initiative aims to serve as an incubator for ideas and projects for young people from both sides of the Mediterranean, regardless of their country of origin, cultural background, or political ideology.

Balzarini Zane's inclination towards political analysis has been evident since the early years of his academic career. During this time, he delved into decision-making mechanisms governing international relations and the role of diplomacy in conflict prevention and management. His methodological approach combines empirical research with statistical analysis. The value of his contribution to political science lies in his ability to highlight marginalised geopolitical dynamics, aligning with a research stream that not only describes reality but also provides analytical tools to interpret it and influence it in a more informed and aware direction.

Through meticulous documentation and critical analysis based on verifiable data, Balzarini Zane's work aims not only to inform but also to stimulate broader reflection on the role of information and diplomacy in the contemporary era. In a context where media dynamics and economic interests increasingly influence geopolitics, his research serves as an essential contribution to restoring complexity and depth to public debates often reduced to superficial simplifications.

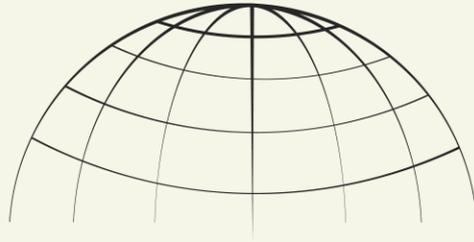


Credits

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FORGOTTEN WARS

No conflict is too small to be told

According to data from the United Nations and leading international think tanks, there are currently over 50 active conflicts worldwide. Yet, media outlets and public opinion to focus on only a few war zones: numerous smaller conflicts are overlooked daily, despite their seemingly localised nature, which actually represents a significant portion of the geopolitical chessboard where global balances are defined.

Our century, especially in terms of its complex geopolitical reality, cannot be fully understood by relying solely on the selective narratives of mainstream media. Selective storytelling inevitably leads to distorted awareness, preventing civil society from gaining insight into international dynamics. This is not intended to spark scandal or fuel conspiracy theories; rather, it is about acknowledging the strength and inevitability of framing and agenda-setting mechanisms inherent in media practices.

In this context, Forgotten Wars aims not merely to list these conflicts, but to narrate them through an analytical approach, delving into their historical causes, internal dynamics, and international consequences. Ignoring such realities, which by nature remain far from major media spotlights, does not only risk allowing large unstable and uncontrolled areas to become incubators for future global threats but also relegates every individual directly involved to oblivion, condemning them to violence and death.
