

# Armed groups and intra-state conflicts: the dawn of a new era?

**Arnaud Blin\***

Arnaud Blin is a Research Fellow at the French Institute of Strategic Analysis and Co-ordinator of the Forum for a New World Governance.

## **Abstract**

*Have the various profound changes that have affected the world, and particularly its geostrategic dimensions, since the end of the Cold War radically altered the nature of conflicts? Twenty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union and ten years after the destruction of the twin towers in New York, there is an apparent degree of continuity in the resilience of former centres of unresolved conflicts and of armed groups involved in them. Nonetheless, whereas most armed conflicts can today be classified as 'intra-state', the general context has changed to the extent that reference is now made to the phenomenon of 'new wars'. Increasingly unacceptable economic and political imbalances along with globalization, environmental damage and its consequences or the emergence of large-scale conflicts triggered by organized crime are some of the perils already affecting the nature of today's conflicts or potentially defining those of the future. As the period dominated by jihadist groups with a universalist vocation possibly draws to an end, the current trend seems to be towards a new generation of guerrilla fighters who stand to benefit, in particular, from the erosion of the nation-state and from geopolitical convulsions arising from the post-colonial legacy as the starting point for intensely zealous and violent long-term ventures. The impact of globalization could cause a flare-up of*

\* Arnaud Blin is the author of a dozen works on conflict history. These include *Histoire du terrorisme: De l'Antiquité à Al Qaida*, with Gérard Chaliand, Bayard, Paris, 2004/2006 (*The History of Terrorism: From Antiquity to Al Qaeda*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 2007) and *La Paix de Westphalie*, Editions Complexe, Brussels, 2006.

*some existing conflicts that are currently limited in scope while the international community struggles to redefine other rules and to adapt them to the new dialectic of war and peace.*

⋮⋮⋮⋮⋮

*If you wish to know the deep truth about war, you need to understand that it follows the laws of the bow and arrow. The arrow is the soldier, the bow is the general, and the person doing the shooting is the sovereign.*<sup>1</sup> (Sun Bin)

*Peace: in international affairs, a period of cheating between two periods of fighting.*<sup>2</sup> (Ambrose Bierce)

## **Towards new wars?**

Although it is not always possible to assert that war is a vector of social change, social change is undoubtedly a force that changes warfare. Regardless of whether it is political, geopolitical, economic, social, intellectual, spiritual, or industrial, the immediate effect of each break with the past or each revolution is to change the nature of warfare, to alter our attitude to war, and to transform the inextricable and complex relationship between political and military action. As a corollary, the new face of war is revealed to us: in other words, the face of those actively engaged in the fighting, irrespective of whether they are regular or irregular armies, battling fiercely in the hope of gaining power, recognition, and political legitimacy. Each of those breaks with the past, or revolutions, is generally fuelled by the hope that the newly beginning period will be one in which there is a clear or even definitive reduction in the number of conflicts. In most cases, unfortunately not only are there no fewer conflicts but all too often those conflicts announce a new stage in the ‘progression’ of violence, introducing forms of violence that had long since become obsolete or were previously unknown.

In this article, we will endeavour to outline the main trends in the geostrategic shift that has been taking place before our very eyes over the past twenty years or so by presenting a portrait of the new actors concerned. The shift is difficult to apprehend: a single occurrence does not make it customary; the break with the preceding period, that of the cold war, was not ratified by a major peace conference or by treaties aimed at restructuring the world and establishing new conditions of war and peace. There was no Peace of Westphalia, Congress of Vienna, Treaty of Versailles, or Yalta Conference. Despite the lack of formal agreements, a major

- 1 Sun Bin, *The Art of War* (fourth century BC), English translation of the original quote in French in *Economica*, Paris, 1996, Chapter X, p. 41.
- 2 Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil’s Dictionary*, Dover, New York, 1993, p. 32. The American satirical journalist Ambrose Bierce (1842–1914) was extremely popular in his day. He was deeply affected by his personal experience of the American War of Secession. He disappeared without a trace during the Mexican Revolution.

peace conference, or an attempt to establish a new world order, the metamorphosis is still impressive, starting with that of war and of those making war.

This transformation in the methods of organized violence will form the leitmotif of this study, in which we will focus first of all on the most widespread and murderous conflicts of the period, intra-state conflicts – conflicts within one state rather than between two or more states – conducted by irregular armed groups; those conflicts are today at the heart of wars that are sometimes difficult to categorize as new types of conflict or alternatively as a crumbling of façades. Nevertheless, that is what we will attempt to do. Moreover, the erosion of the nation-state – or at least of its omnipotence in controlling organized violence, on which it had a monopoly until recently – is a trend that is very likely to increase, with consequences that cannot yet be foreseen and effects that cannot yet be measured.

The global decline in the nation-state, a long-term phenomenon whose short-term consequences should not be exaggerated, can be linked to the sudden collapse of some state apparatuses whose disintegration has rapid, violent repercussions beyond the borders of the countries concerned. It is evident that some free-falling countries will be in need of consistent efforts by the international community to help to repair the structures of those states that have failed or are in great difficulty. It is not unhelpful to recall that the Balkan crises that arose as a result of the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire were what led to World War I or that the burdensome legacy of the Western or Soviet colonial era (and of post-colonialism) is causing tremors similar to those that shook the Ottoman, Russian, and Austrian empires before the Great War.

In the words of Clausewitz, war is a chameleon.<sup>3</sup> It is continuously changing and adapting. It is thus natural for war to change in style.<sup>4</sup> While the twentieth century witnessed the arrival of mechanization and then of nuclear weapons, which first reinforced and then, by a strategic paradox, wiped out paroxysmal violence, the most striking phenomenon in the twenty-first century is the asymmetry between extremely high-tech warfare and new forms of organized violence, which indirectly eradicate the impact of the most sophisticated weaponry.<sup>5</sup> The phenomenon referred to as ‘new wars’ also involves the erosion of all the

- 3 Reference may be made to the study of this subject by Raymond Aron, who tells us: ‘Thinking of contemporary wars as Clausewitz did does not consist of mechanically applying concepts applicable to Prussian officers but of faithfully following a method. As war is a chameleon in both senses of the word – war changes from one situation to the next and is complex in every situation – the primary task of a statesman is to determine the true nature of that particular war that it is his responsibility to understand or conduct’. See Raymond Aron, *Penser la guerre: Clausewitz, Tome II, l'âge planétaire*, Gallimard, Paris, 1976, p. 185 (*Clausewitz: Philosopher of War*, London: Routledge, 1983) (ICRC translation.) With regard to wars in the twenty-first century, it should also be recalled that Clausewitz was initially a theoretician of ‘small-scale war’ or guerrilla warfare – drawing his inspiration from the example of Spain – before he became a philosopher of war.
- 4 See the seminal work by Martin Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, New York, Free Press, 1991; and the surprising analysis by Roger Caillois, *Bellone ou la pente de la guerre*, Fata Morgana, Fontfroide-le-Haut, 1994. Although written by a multifaceted and hence non-specialist author, this is one of the most incisive works every produced on the evolution of war.
- 5 There is no better illustration of the phenomenon than the war in Afghanistan, where a superpower with the most sophisticated weapons clashes in the same setting with foot soldiers fighting (almost) as in the Middle Ages. Obviously, the asymmetry is disrupted when foot soldiers prove capable of destroying a

traditional parameters of war that distinguish between lawful and unlawful actors, states and private protagonists, soldiers and civilians, intra- and inter-state wars, and political and lucrative objectives. A concise definition of new wars is presented by Mary Kaldor:

My central argument is that, during the last decades of the twentieth century, a new type of organized violence developed, especially in Africa and Eastern Europe, which is one aspect of the current globalized era. I describe this type of violence as 'new war'. I use the term 'new' to distinguish such wars from prevailing perceptions of war drawn from an earlier era . . . I use the term 'war' to emphasize the political nature of this type of violence, even though . . . the new wars involve a blurring of the distinction between war (usually defined as violence between state or organized political groups for political motives), organized crime (violence undertaken by privately organized groups for private purposes, usually financial gain) and large-scale violations of human rights (violence undertaken by states or politically organized groups against individuals).<sup>6</sup>

What makes those wars really 'new'? The scope for discussion is vast! It may be argued that they are the fruit of all those disparate phenomena that make up the world today, beginning with those closely or remotely linked to globalization,<sup>7</sup> which, as the philosopher Edgar Morin reminds us, merely 'sustains its own crisis. Its dynamism engenders multiple and various crises on a planetary scale.'<sup>8</sup> *A contrario*, those new wars are also, in a way, part of the ongoing development of the guerrilla warfare of the 1960s, of the low-intensity conflicts in the period following the Korean war, and of the revolution in military affairs (RMA) that was proclaimed during the closing years of the twentieth century in the United States and driven by the Pentagon and that emphasized the armed forces' new technologies and their communication, information, and organization systems.

state-of-the-art helicopter with a simple rocket-launcher. However, political rather than strategic factors (at least at the operational level) often cancel out purely military and technological superiority with the limitations imposed on regular armies, especially when the fighting takes place far from home. See in particular, and especially with regard to humanitarian consequences, Robin Geiss, 'Asymmetric conflict structures', in *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 88, No. 864, December 2006, pp. 757–777; Toni Pfanner, 'Asymmetrical warfare from the perspective of humanitarian law and humanitarian action', in *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 87, No. 857, March 2005, pp. 149–174.

- 6 Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2006, pp. 1–2. See also Herfried Münkler, *The New Wars*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2005. Other authors refer to 'postmodern' warfare although, in conceptual terms, the ideas presented are very similar to those relating to new wars. See, for example, Victor Davis Hanson, 'Postmodern war', in *City Journal*, winter 2005. On the transformation of war in the twenty-first century but without engaging in semantic debates, Laurent Murawiec provides an analysis of conflicts based on the ideas developed in the context of the revolution in military affairs: *La Guerre au XXIe siècle*, Odile Jacob, Paris, 2000. For an incisive analysis of the causes and consequences of the strategic shift, see the essay by Gérard Chaliand, *Le nouvel art de la guerre*, Hachette, Paris, 2009.
- 7 See, nonetheless, Sadowski's warnings about the relation between globalization and war in the post-cold-war period: Yahia Sadowski, *The Myth of Global Chaos*, Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, 1998.
- 8 Edgar Morin, *La Voie*, Fayard, Paris, 2011, p. 21.

Above all, the phenomenon of new wars recalls that of the major conflicts that occupied pre-Westphalian Europe, particularly those associated with the Thirty Years War (1618–1648), during which the impassioned violence of the wars of religion intertwined with the power struggles between rival factions and states. Rereading the large picaresque novel of the period, Grimmelshausen's *Simplicius simplicissimus*,<sup>9</sup> reminds us that the cycles of war often cause us to relive the same situations and the same horrors. While the current situation may rekindle the European memory of the seventeenth century, it is also able to do so because the termination of the cold war put a definitive end to the system of conflict management that was set up at the end of the Thirty Years War and to which Europe – and then the world – adhered, for better or for worse, for 350 years.

In a way, we have come full circle, the Westphalian system proving incapable of preventing the major conflagrations of the twentieth century or the disintegration of the area – Europe – that it was supposed to protect. The emergence of 'new wars', whatever their historic originality, is therefore a direct consequence of there being no system of world governance capable of guaranteeing the stability and security of the entire planet. However, if one lesson must be drawn from the Thirty Years War, it is that, without effective peace mechanisms, violent localized conflicts of the kind that can be observed today may spread very quickly to other areas and drag whole regions into a downward spiral. In this overview, we will see, from what is apparent in the world today, how real that threat may be, although we are fully aware that our ability to anticipate the major upheavals of the future is regularly undermined by rarely foreseen turns of events.

In theory if not in practice, the phenomenon of 'new wars' calls into question the validity of the traditional typology of conflicts, which made a clear distinction between conventional and irregular warfare, with a whole range of conflicts extending from guerrilla warfare, urban guerrilla warfare, or low-intensity conflicts to the virtuality of nuclear war, each of which has its own particular features. From that perspective, the distinction between each of those conflicts becomes blurred, and the two poles of the spectrum of organized violence – terrorism and nuclear war – come together in the highly symbolic (and currently virtual) threat of a form of terrorism that makes use of weapons of mass destruction. Moving away from a typology that has so far been based on operational methods, the nature of the protagonists, the political objectives and demands, or the degree of violence, we now need to adopt a broader vision of conflicts, which takes account of the various factors or weighs up each of them against the others and draws attention to other phenomena outside the realm of generic categories. Furthermore, the character of present-day and future warfare underlines the very notion of a typology because, in a way, the concepts of 'new wars' or 'postmodern wars' constitute a refusal to establish cut-and-dried categories by insisting on the historicity of conflicts that are typical of the present era. In that sense, that also takes us back, in a

9 Hans Jakob Cristoffel von Grimmelshausen, *Der Abenteurliche Simplicissimus Teutsch*, first published 1669. It has been translated several times in France and in the United Kingdom under the title of *Les aventures de Simplicius Simplicissimus/The adventures of Simplicius Simplicissimus*.

way, to a traditional view of war, in that, regardless of its form, war has intrinsic, fundamentally unchanging characteristics. It is not by chance that Clausewitz and Sun Tzu, who wrote about the strategic dimensions, are so popular today, whereas Jomini, who was once extremely influential and whose strategic thinking was essentially based on the operational dimension of war, has fallen out of favour.<sup>10</sup> The nineteenth-century strategists, most of whom were trained soldiers, saw war and politics as two separate entities, whereas the twentieth century favoured a holistic approach, in which war was seen as a facet of politics, similar to diplomacy. This change really set in with World War I, which witnessed, on the one hand, the apotheosis of theories about total war and, on the other, the emergence of the Marxist revolutionary vision expounded first by Lenin and then by Mao, both of whom were well acquainted with Clausewitz,<sup>11</sup> Mao also being versed in classic Chinese strategic thinking.

Beyond those theoretical and semantic discussions, events oblige us to ask more mundane questions about the immediate evolution of conflicts. We are therefore prompted to ask whether the death of the figurehead of the jihadist movements, Osama Bin Laden, after a decade characterized by the media attention given to armed jihadist groups, marks the end of a period in which terrorism was affirmed as the privileged method of numerous insurrectional movements throughout the world. Are we to expect a re-emergence of classic guerrilla warfare as seen throughout the history of the twentieth century? The same applies to the impassioned conflicts that have caused millions of deaths, particularly in Africa. And what about the new threats associated with fierce competition for natural resources or the rapid deterioration of the environment? These questions will guide us through this brief survey, which is of necessity non-exhaustive but through which we will endeavour to define the planetary conflict situation. We will also pick out some of the currently most significant non-state armed groups which, for decades or in the recent past, have been using violence to challenge the authority of established regimes in various places. Having looked at warfare today and the possible implications of the 'Arab Spring', we will move on to review armed groups that are actively participating in contemporary conflicts. We will then describe more specifically the conflicts on the fringe of the former Soviet Union. Finally, we will endeavour to establish the nature of the threats and demands of various armed groups in the world and will turn our attention to the phenomenon of wars of passion, to our persistent powerlessness in the face of war, and to the new age of minorities, before concluding by defining some future paths.

10 Nonetheless, a new edition of his synthetic work has been published in France, where it is also available as a paperback: Antoine-Henri Jomini, *Précis de l'art de la guerre*, Perrin, Paris, 2008. In the nineteenth century, Jomini enjoyed tremendous prestige, far greater than that of Clausewitz.

11 Lenin's interest in the Prussian philosopher is evident in his copiously annotated copy of *On War*. In a letter to Karl Marx (1858), Engels seems to prefer Jomini: 'Jomini is definitely the better historian and, apart from a few excellent things, I do not like the innate genius of Clausewitz', while Lenin is wholehearted in his preference: 'Clausewitz is one of the most profound military writers, one of the greatest, one of the most remarkable philosophers and historians of war, a writer whose basic ideas have today become the indisputable property of every thinker'.

## War today: beyond appearances

The present internet age tends to blur the borders between reality and virtuality and to do away with space–time in favour of immediacy. As the problems of war and conflict are long-term, this has logically given rise to a gap between a general perception of war as failed politics – partly owing to the fact that the military objectives do not necessarily tally with the political objectives – and hence as an anomaly, and a reality in which war tends to be a continuation of those politics by other means.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, our perception of conflicts is disrupted by the fusion of contemporary and potential conflicts, of global instability and real dangers, of economic crises and geostrategic disorders. Moreover, the other current phenomenon, economic globalization, has not yet genuinely produced a globalization of conflicts, since nearly three-quarters of the armed conflicts listed today are intra-state conflicts.<sup>13</sup> These do not involve external elements (at least, not directly) and do not extend beyond the borders of one country.<sup>14</sup> All in all, if there is one area in which past systems still seem to work, it is that of war.

Armed conflicts, wars, and the groups taking part therefore appear to be anything but revolutionary. On the other hand, it could almost be said that our difficulty with understanding the present moment is primarily due to the mismatch between a world that is in a state of flux and wars that have not left the past behind. Those wars are fought with conventional weapons, within state borders, for mundane reasons and classic issues, most of which are limited to power struggles or aspirations to autonomy. Ultimately, only the omnipresence of a radical Islamist ideology among a large number of active armed groups would appear to have marked a change compared with the previous decades.

Those taking part in such wars also have familiar faces: political regimes that frequently abuse their power and non-state groups motivated by territorial and/or identity claims and seeking legitimacy and means of fighting. Between the two is the famous ‘military–industrial complex’, as it used to be called, which, in accordance with the relentless logic of the market, is fuelled by all conflicts on the planet.

The world’s geopolitical stability – the most important phenomenon being the emergence of new major powers (or superpowers) – nonetheless carries on, year in, year out, aided by the fact that territorial predation, until recently a characteristic feature of human history, is simply out-dated.<sup>15</sup> Where peace and war are

12 See, for example, the incisive analysis by Raymond Aron, *Sur Clausewitz*, Complexe, Brussels, 1987, pp. 152–183.

13 In accordance with the 2010 classification of the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIIC), ‘Conflict Barometer 2010’, Heidelberg, 2011.

14 Recent studies tend to show that globalization apparently increases the mortality rate in inter-ethnic conflicts in contrast to other types of conflict. See Susan Olzak, ‘Does globalization breed ethnic discontent?’, in *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 55, No. 1, February 2011, pp. 3–32.

15 Moreover, the paradox of contemporary international politics has to do with the incapacity of the world’s leading countries to manage the crises that may arise in various places. Michael Howard sums up this dilemma: ‘Peoples who are not prepared to put their forces in harm’s way fight at some disadvantage against those who are. Tomahawk cruise missiles may command the air, but it is Kalashnikov

concerned, there is a major difference between territorial predation – which is characteristic of imperial history – and economic predation – which is characteristic of the capitalist era – in that the latter does not necessarily lead to organized violence or armed conflict. All this is an attempt to clarify a geostrategic situation that may seem confused but that, in many respects, is not. Nowadays, the strategic shift triggered by the realignment of the major powers is accompanied by relative geopolitical stability, as the configuration of the political world map has been virtually unchanged since the death of the colonial empires, the last of which to collapse was the Soviet Union.<sup>16</sup>

On closer examination, however, present conflicts have a particular feature that partly changes the matter, in that they operate in a context in which, for various reasons, the case is not cut and dried, with everything that used to constitute war being considered a war, with a beginning and an end, in a defined territory and with known and recognized players.<sup>17</sup> All that is now challenged, as we observed above in the discussion on ‘new wars’. The very notion of power, which is nonetheless the essential – and traditional – aspect of balances of power, has now been turned completely upside down by the new conflict dynamics, not to mention the concepts of combatants and non-combatants or even of the legitimacy of the use of force.<sup>18</sup> The fact that many wars kill far more people by the indirect impact of war – in the Congo or Sudan, for example, with a ratio of 1 : 8 for deaths occurring during the fighting or outside the fighting – thus alter the dynamics of a conflict and its setting.<sup>19</sup>

On this crucial matter, General Jean-René Bachelet writes,

The balance of power stopped being a decisive factor with the conjunction of two phenomena: on the one hand, the relative restraint shown by Western

sub-machine guns that still rule the ground. It is an imbalance that makes the enforcement of world affairs a rather problematic affair’ (Michael Howard, *The Invention of Peace: Reflections on War and the International Order*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2000, p. 102). It should be pointed out that this passage has been taken from a work that was written before the military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

- 16 More than territorial reconfiguration, it is the role of the state that changes. The state is becoming increasingly unable to meet the present challenges but still plays a key role, both because it is the sole body able to legitimize the use of force and frequently has a monopoly on the use of force and because as yet no other entity has really stepped into the breach. François Géré sums up the current problems regarding the state: ‘Traditionally the guarantor of a defined territory, the state is today caught between the rock of globalization and the hard place of regionalization. This phenomenon calls into question certain national entities more than others. As the organizer of domestic security and responsible for external defence, a state constitutes the interface between a given community at a particular moment in history and the other states, representing other communities made up of aggregate interests. However, the founding principle of international relations is being challenged – admittedly somewhat rapidly – in the name of globalization, micro-regionalization and the emergence of non-state actors with good or bad intentions’ (François Géré, *La Société sans la guerre*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1998, p. 267).
- 17 The privatization of war is of itself a major source of concern. See Dina Rasor and Robert Baumann, *Betraying our Troops: The Destructive Results of Privatizing War*, Palgrave, New York, 2007.
- 18 See Michael Mann, *Power in the 21st Century*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, CA, 2011.
- 19 In the Congo, for example, 350,000 of the 2,500,000 victims between 1998 and 2001 apparently died in armed combat. These figures must obviously be treated with caution. See Andreas Wenger and Simon J. A. Mason, ‘The civilianization of armed conflict: trends and implications’, in *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 90, No. 872, December 2008, p. 836.



powers in the use of force; on the other hand, the irredentist position held by the 'weaker' nations, with the massive involvement of populations. The stronger party is a shackled Gulliver and the weaker party, even if without the means to achieve a real victory, can prolong the conflict indefinitely.<sup>20</sup>

In such a context, in which the rules are ambiguous if they exist at all and the hierarchy of the strong and the weak<sup>21</sup> becomes blurred while the gap widens between rich and poor countries, where war never seems to end<sup>22</sup> but the conflicts remain unresolved, and where the great certainties of the past about modernization and democratization are crumbling, it is difficult to see what the future will hold. One thing is certain, however: while the operational dimension of current conflicts is familiar to us, their strategic and political dimensions have changed. That is the sense in which present wars, irrespective of whether they are classified as 'new' or 'postmodern', can be different from those of the past.

## After the Arab Spring

It is a fact that the planet's geostrategic dynamics have undergone an astonishing change in two decades, at the very point in time when we celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the collapse of the Soviet Union and, with it, the end of the cold war. As if to mark that anniversary, the Arab world has treated us in 2011 to a monumental surprise with the spectacular collapse of several regimes that people believed would last at least for a long time, if not for ever. As for the post-1991 period, the political metamorphosis of the Arab world will most probably lead to internal conflicts that may well breed a new generation of armed groups with various demands, even if this only occurs as a result of the inevitable power struggle.

Will those burgeoning groups materialize from jihadist splinter groups claiming allegiance to Al Qaeda or will they be a variety of the insurgent warlords who originated in West Africa, or will we see the emergence of new kinds of entity?<sup>23</sup> It is still too soon to put forward serious hypotheses while the revolution is in its infancy. Nonetheless, we are already in a position to observe a phenomenon that is, at least, surprising: the negligible impact of the jihadist groups in those revolutions. While those groups derived their political legitimacy by asserting that they were the only ones able to topple the governments in place, the governments in question derived their political legitimacy by portraying themselves as the only defence against the jihadists. In this regard, events are prompting us to challenge

20 Jean-René Bachelet, *Bringing the Violence of War under Control in a Globalized World*, Forum for a New World Governance (FNGM), Paris, 2009, pp. 11–12.

21 See, for example, Ivan Arreguin-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005.

22 See Bruce Berkowitz, *The New Face of War: How War will be Fought in the 21st Century*, The Free Press, New York, 2003, p. 103.

23 See William McCants, 'Al Qaeda's challenge', in *International Herald Tribune*, 23 August 2011.

their future capacity to acquire that legitimacy. In terms of revolutionary vectors, Twitter, Facebook, and the new means of communication in general will ultimately have had more impact than a movement that was seen by many ten years ago as being the greatest threat in the twenty-first century. In particular, these revolutions have completely obliterated the notion of territorial borders; they spread rapidly from one country to the next while not even geographical proximity played a decisive role, and the leaders proved unable to prevent the spread of information and pictures.

As for the future of the region, a distinction should be made between the short and the long term. In the immediate future, a political recasting of the Arab world would be bound to lead to heterogeneous political regimes, a situation that, as we know, is generally the cause of tensions if not conflict, particularly inter-state conflict, with the possible interference, and therefore the emergence, of armed groups that may well have the backing of states wishing to become involved in their neighbour's internal affairs. Furthermore, the Libyan crisis and the intervention by the United Nations and then by NATO took us a little further towards a break with one of the basic principles of the Westphalian order that is still part of our present heritage and is included in the Charter of the United Nations,<sup>24</sup> that of absolute respect for national sovereignty and non-interference in a country's internal affairs. Paradoxically, that principle established in the seventeenth century in the name of respect for human rights – in the context of the wars of religion – is now being challenged in the name of those same human rights. However, in the absence of rock-solid principles for dealing with interference (or intervention to 'protect' – the 'responsibility to protect' evoked by the United Nations – for humanitarian reasons), a Pandora's box is opened that cannot then be closed, for better or for worse.<sup>25</sup>

Alternatively, over the longer term, a wave of democratization could conceivably roll over the area and ultimately lead to the establishment of lasting

24 In Article 2(7): 'Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter; but this principle shall not prejudice the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII.'

25 The principle of the 'responsibility to protect' ('RTP' or 'R2P') adopted by the United Nations in 2005 is directed towards protecting populations from mass atrocities. In accordance with the concept, 'where a population is suffering serious harm, as a result of internal war, insurgency, repression or state failure, and the state in question is unwilling or unable to halt or avert it, the principle of non-intervention yields to the international responsibility to protect' (see Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, 'The Responsibility to Protect', International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, 2001, pp. XI, XII, available at: <http://responsibilitytoprotect.org/ICISS%20Report.pdf> (last visited 1 November 2011)). The R2P was referred to by the Security Council on 22 February 2011 in the context of the Libyan crisis with this official press statement: 'The members of the Security Council called on the Government of Libya to meet its responsibility to protect its population. They called upon the Libyan authorities to act with restraint, to respect human rights and international humanitarian law, and to allow immediate access for international human rights monitors and humanitarian agencies'. See 'Security Council Press Statement on Libya', UN Doc. SC/10180, AFR/2120, 22 February 2011, available at: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2011/sc10180.doc.htm> (last visited 8 November 2011).

peace<sup>26</sup> in the entire region, including the Near East.<sup>27</sup> We have not yet reached that point. However, one thing is (almost) certain: in that region, the problem of war and peace is going to develop substantially over the next few years, with the possible or even probable outbreak of new armed conflicts, including intra-state conflicts, and fresh activities by various non-state armed groups.

It can be observed today that, in the Gaza Strip, Hamas must reach a compromise with various radical groups, similar to those in jihadist–Salafist circles, that challenge its authority and legitimacy and complicate negotiations with Israel by engaging in sporadic shooting against the latter and in southern Jordan. Similarly, the government in Yemen is having to deal with several armed groups that are challenging its authority in some regions. This applies to the best-known of those movements, Al Qaeda, with regard to the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which set up to the east of Yemen, whereas the army is having to deal with another armed group in the north, led by Abdel Malek al-Huthi, with a Shiite background. This type of situation tends to continue for some time without one party or the other succeeding in overthrowing or crushing its adversary. Yemen is more likely to become ensnared in war without achieving a peaceful outcome in the short or medium term. Moreover, an important distinction may appropriately be made between those two entities, with one of them (AQAP) belonging to the jihadist groups that proclaim broader, global-scale objectives – including the anti-Western struggle – while the other keeps to classic guerrilla warfare in its attempts to gain political power. The challenging of the political order in the north of the country by the Huthi movement, which is very well established among the people and has an organizational structure, contrasts with the relative security gap favouring the establishment of the AQAP in the south. Nonetheless, the political and strategic (as well as economic and logistic) necessities and the universalist character of the jihadist ideology each help to blur the traditional boundary between small groups with a national vocation and those with universal aspirations. That distinction applies elsewhere: for example, between the organizations affiliated to Al Qaeda and most of the others. The current pervading presence of radical Islamist ideology has confused the situation further still by banding together all groups claiming to adhere to that ideology, regardless of their political objectives, especially as they resort to similar techniques, beginning with that of terrorism.

26 The question of peace and democracy is at the heart of discussions on the essence of political science, as it is one of the rare political phenomena considered to be a 'law'. See, in particular, Miriam Fendius Elman (ed.), *Paths to Peace: Is Democracy the Answer?*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1997; and especially Michael Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace*, Norton, New York, 1997.

27 However, the problem of democratization and violence is complex. Reference may be made in that respect to the conclusions drawn from the Colombian experience on the notion that all groups should have access to power for democracy to be complete. See Mario Chacón, James A. Robinson, and Ragnar Torvik, 'When is democracy an equilibrium? Theory and evidence from Columbia's La Violencia', in *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 55, No. 3, June 2011, pp. 366–396.

## Armed groups: continuity and change

With a few exceptions, such as the Mexican cartels, whose aims are fundamentally criminal, the vast majority of the contemporary armed groups are primarily driven by political objectives. Although some of these groups have drifted towards criminal activities, this is first and foremost because of a need to fund their activities. Moreover, in the case of Mexico, the conflict engendered by the exponential growth of large-scale crime is seen at present to be mostly affecting people associated with organized crime (90%, according to the official figures of the Mexican government drawn up by the leaders,<sup>28</sup> which should be treated with caution; the remaining 10% – again according to the government – comprising civilians and members of the forces of order). If that tendency is confirmed, current conflicts are not automatically leading to violence against civilians. Moreover, the violence caused by drug cartels has now reached a level that makes it possible to define this other kind of conflict as war.<sup>29</sup>

Whereas geopolitical and geostrategic revolutions speed up the rise and fall of non-state and transnational armed groups, they cannot prevent other groups from continuing to exist and remain active, even though the reason why they were originally established has ceased to apply because the situation has changed. Today, a world map of armed groups shows us a mix of other groups (similar to the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) in Colombia) that are fighting for past causes but using means appropriate to the political (and economic) situation and of movements that have come to light during recent geostrategic shifts, such as in Central Asia or the Caucasus. The conflict in the Near East is in its seventh decade and the Palestinian armed groups have gradually evolved, particularly with regard to their ideology, with radical Islamism having largely replaced the secular ideologies as the intellectual basis for movements, some of which have, moreover, achieved greater political legitimacy. Otherwise, the conflict still seems as far from a solution as ever, although the political evolution in that area in the wake of the Arab Spring could rapidly open up new, previously un hoped-for perspectives.

Apart from some cases, such as that of the FARC, which are slowly losing pace, most armed groups that are involved in wars of national liberation seeking to break with the colonial era have logically deteriorated, with their out-of-date cause unable to generate the popular or even economic support needed to ensure their political success. Today, as in Uruguay where the former Tupamaro José Mujica was appointed President of the Republic in 2010, former guerrilla fighters have succeeded to power through democratic channels. Moreover, a certain number

28 Notably by President Calderon, who disclosed these figures publicly in April 2010.

29 Let us recall that, traditionally, war is a legal concept while conflict is primarily a sociological concept and therefore less precise. The former implies a certain level of violence while the second presents a broader range, which does not necessarily imply armed violence. More specifically, the subjective barometer that is applied nowadays is nonetheless a useful means of classifying a conflict as war: a threshold of 1,000 or more deaths. In 2010 the HIIK referred to the Mexican conflict for the first time as a war. Armed conflict is also a legal term; see, for example, Sylvain Vité, 'Typology of armed conflicts in international humanitarian law: legal concepts and actual situations', in *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 91, No. 873, March 2009, pp. 69–94.

of small groups that are too weak to engage in armed fighting and that were forced to resort exclusively to the weapon of terrorism have been obliged to withdraw as a result of the spectacular but unsustainable attacks organized by Al Qaeda between 2001 and 2005. The despicable and disproportionate nature of those attacks led to a substantial decrease in the room for manoeuvre and in the legitimacy of movements such as ETA (which formally announced in October 2011 that it would end its armed fight).

The map of insurrectional conflicts has actually moved distinctly from the American continent towards Asia, with an ideological shift that has for some time favoured radical Islamism over the various Marxist currents, although the latter may be about to return in force. The emergence in northern Paraguay of the Paraguayan People's Army, which follows the line taken by the FARC with its pursuit of guerrilla warfare and hostage-taking, perhaps signals a renaissance of this type of movement in a region with a long history of insurrectional warfare and a terrain that is suitable for that form of armed violence.

The year 2011 will perhaps mark a new stage in the history of conflict, with the death of Osama Bin Laden in the spring symbolically closing a period of ten years under the threat of terrorism whose failure to make a political impact was inversely proportionate to the anguished obsession of the people and the media, fed by an impressive series of attacks, primarily in Muslim countries. It may be hoped that the death of Al Qaeda's historic leader will at the same time lift the veil from other conflicts that are infinitely more murderous but have been largely forgotten as a result of insufficient media coverage. As for the economic health of the nations, the possible interest of the international community in some conflicts affecting areas on the periphery of geostrategic interests is fundamentally imbalanced; the countries described as being in the 'south', particularly on the African continent, are not treated in the same way as the 'strategic' regions that have a bearing on the political and economic interests of the 'northern' countries, which should be taken as including emerging market countries.<sup>30</sup> In that sense, the UN is, in a way, also fostering that unequal treatment, as it is keener to take more resolute and rapid action against a leader such as Gaddafi than one such as Mugabe, for example.<sup>31</sup>

The 2011 map thus shows that intra-state armed conflict remains largely confined to a few areas in Asia and Africa. What are the distinctive phenomena at

30 Nonetheless, it is also apparent that, however well intended, external interference does not necessarily produce positive results. See David E. Cunningham, 'Blocking resolution: how external states can prolong civil wars', in *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 47, No. 2, March 2010, pp. 115–127.

31 It is surprising to reread the work on peace written by the economist Thorstein Veblen around one hundred years ago (1917); the problem of war and peace, and particularly the matter of 'national interest' has apparently not changed. The following passage speaks for itself: 'Hitherto the movement toward peace has not gone beyond this conception of it, as a collusive safeguarding of national discrepancies by force of arms. Such a peace is necessarily precarious, partly because armed force is useful for breaking the peace, partly because the national discrepancies, by which these current peace-makers set such store, are a constant source of embroilment. But what they actually seemed concerned about is their preservation. A peace by collusive neglect of those remnants of feudalistic make-believe that still serve to divide the pacific nations has hitherto not seriously come under advisement.' Thorstein Veblen, *The Nature of Peace*, Transaction Publishers, London, 1998, p. 302.

present?<sup>32</sup> First, the extension of vast areas impervious to serious fighting, such as Europe or, with a few exceptions, the entire American continent (north and south).<sup>33</sup> Second, the fact that intra-state conflicts are confined to their original areas; this includes areas of prolonged fighting such as the region of the Great Lakes in Africa. On the whole, internal conflicts do not lead to intervention by rival countries that are anxious to exploit the situation, as was frequently the case in other periods in history. Obviously, like Russia and China, regional powers are quick to respond when interventions encroach on their private territory but the asymmetrical balance of powers leads in such cases to generally swift, and harsh, resolution of the local disputes, with all the long-term resentment engendered by such an approach.

## The periphery of the former Soviet Union

In the case of Russia, numerous conflicts have taken place on the southern fringe of the former Soviet Union, particularly in those regions deconstructed and (badly) reconstructed by Stalin, where, for many reasons, the current strategic stakes are high. That applies to Central Asia, or at least to some parts of it, and to the northern and southern Caucasus, three areas that, moreover, were traditionally coveted by one party or another from the time of the Mongols and the Timurides to the era of the British and tsarist Russia. Unlike the former Soviet republics and other European satellites, the countries of Central Asia were subject to the tyranny of former apparatchiks, as most of them still are today. The latter have merely postponed the date of an inevitable political shift that, over time, has worsened the increasingly severe, regularly surfacing tensions. Those tensions have led to acts of considerable violence that regularly hit the headlines and to outbreaks of inter-ethnic conflict that primarily express what essentially remains a substantial political (and economic) malaise.

Some countries, such as Kazakhstan, are pursuing the path of modernization while redefining the balance of regional powers, which logically favours the stronger entities over the weaker or the more reactionary, with all the popular resentment that the new situation may engender. The internal conflicts in Central Asia as in the Caucasus, where tension with regard to Europe is permanent, are mixed up with power struggles, inter-state rivalry, and regional strategic issues, with the possibility of violence erupting at any moment.

That is the case in the northern Caucasus, which has six republics, dozens of ethnic groups, and a long history of resistance. In 2010 the most murderous

32 In 2011 Lotta Themnér and Peter Wallensteen drew up a list of armed conflicts since World War II. According to their data, in 2010 there was a noticeable decrease in the number of active conflicts, taking it to the lowest level since 2003. Lotta Themnér and Peter Wallensteen, 'Armed conflict 1946–2010', in *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 48, No. 4, July 2011, pp. 525–536.

33 On the long-term evolution of violence, see the recent study by Steven Pinker, in which he refers to 'New Peace' in the post-cold-war world, *The Better Angels of our Nature: The Decline of Violence in History and its Causes*, Allen Lane, London, 2011.

violence took place in Dagestan, where 378 people, including 78 civilians, lost their lives. The main movement in the country, Shariat Jamaat, is not alone, as five other groups are also active in that area. The fact that Kabardino-Balkaria now ranks second in terms of political violence, although it seemed to be spared it not long ago, tends to show that the situation has been anything but resolved in that region, where the insurrectionist groups' operational approach tends to be restricted to terrorist attacks because they are unable to establish a force capable of conducting guerrilla warfare. In terms of their foundations and objectives, the armed groups in the northern Caucasus, which are guided by the jihadist ideology, nonetheless remain independent movements that have little connection with the universalism of Al Qaeda-style movements but enjoy the benefits of a better popular base in their own country. By pointing to the threat of transnational terrorism, the Russian government managed to conduct a relentless campaign in Chechnya in the 2000s without upsetting the international community in the slightest. Yet what will happen in the future? As with all wars of national liberation, independent groups can only work towards the loss of political will on the part of the adversary, which might be achieved by means of popular rejection by the Russian population of a political and military investment of this order in the six republics of the northern Caucasus. We have not yet reached that point.

## Threats and demands

This leads to another observation. The jihadism inspired by Al Qaeda, whose aim, in some people's opinion, was to overthrow the international order by triggering conflicts in various places, has actually not ceased to spread but has done so without changing the geopolitical status quo. The Al Qaeda partisans have never managed to generate a mass movement anywhere or to acquire the means of conducting an armed struggle on a sizeable scale, even locally. Time will tell whether the two most visible movements at present, in Yemen and in the Sahel region, will achieve a greater scale. At present, however, there is no indication that this will occur in the short or medium term. Ultimately, only the misguided pursuits of George W. Bush were able to delude those radical movements, and we are actually nowhere near the anticipated 'clash of civilizations',<sup>34</sup> despite the numerous regrettable attacks in various places, most of which took place in the Muslim world.

Is the emergence or re-emergence of religion in conflict dynamics – which can be traced back to 1979 and the Iranian revolution and the start of the counter-insurrection by the mujahideen against the USSR in Afghanistan – still a driving factor in intra-state conflicts?<sup>35</sup> From Yemen to Somalia, from the Caucasus to the Near East, and from Indonesia to the Sahel, there is no doubt that a number of

34 Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Touchstone, New York, 1997.

35 See, in particular, Gilles Kepel, *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World*, Cambridge, Polity, 1994. Kepel refers, in particular, to 'religions of confusion'.

conflicts are sparked off by armed groups whose claims are partly religious in nature. Does this mean that those conflicts can be described as 'religious'? For many of those movements, religion plays a role that is not very different from that of the Marxist-Leninist ideology throughout most of the twentieth century. In a similar way to that ideology, radical Islamism, regardless of whether it is Shiite or Sunni, is (often) universal in its vocation and therefore, in theory, is associated with struggles that go beyond territorial borders. Most jihadist armed groups have political objectives that do not go beyond seizing power over the area of a conventional state and over an area that is more or less culturally or geographically defined. Unsurprisingly, militant Islamism has a far stronger hold in countries with a weak or even failed state structure, or in ones that find it hard to establish legitimacy (Somalia and Yemen). In addition to its mobilizing nature, radical ideology, regardless of whether it is religious or non-religious, provides moral substance and an organizational strength that is extremely useful to insurrectionist groups. Nonetheless, this radicalism has not really generated the popular support that is vital to insurrectionist groups seeking to overthrow the government in power. Although religion is an element of numerous conflicts, it is only rarely the sole real source of conflict. Again, we are a long way from the anticipated wars of religion.

The threat to the environment was the other major source of our existential fears in the early twenty-first century. It was supposed to lead to new kinds of conflict as a result of population displacement: for example, the competing demands for resources in short supply or the inevitable 'water wars'.<sup>36</sup> The threat to the environment does indeed exist, and our current knowledge seems to suggest that the threat is even more serious than might have been imagined ten or twenty ago. At the same time, there is no substantial indication that the consequences of environmental deterioration actually cause conflicts – at least, conflicts that might deteriorate into serious armed fighting. Again, however, things could change rapidly.

## Wars of passion

In various places, however, conflicts may be observed that are marked by tensions between people groups whose relations, for various reasons, are based on ongoing animosity fuelled by resentment arising from a distant or more recent conflict history; such situations are defined as inter-ethnic conflicts. Where emotions and passions run high, one observes the only conflicts in which hatred and resentment sometimes ride roughshod over political rationality while the powers that be (which are rarely in control of the situation) exploit those same emotions for political ends. The end of the cold war and the geostrategic thaw that accompanied it

36 Water, which is a potential source of conflict, may also present an opportunity to resolve a conflict. See, for example, Mara Tignino, 'Water, international peace, and security', in *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 92, No. 879, September 2010, pp. 647–674.



led to a number of such conflicts or failed to prevent them from degenerating into a bloodbath. The years 1990 and 2000 witnessed bloodthirsty and bloody wars that caused millions of deaths in Europe and in the former Yugoslavia as well as in Africa.

Some of those conflicts, particularly because of their extreme nature and, with regard to the former Yugoslavia, their proximity to Western Europe, led to special efforts by the international community and are therefore now at an end, are being resolved, or, in the case of the hotbed of fighting in the Great Lakes region, are receding. In this last case, reservations are still the order of the day because the area is still studded with armed – often rival – groups opposed to the central government, especially in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Those groups are capable of carrying out atrocities among the civilian populations, and their very presence is a major obstacle to social or economic upturn. From a formal point of view, and before the political conflicts born of the ‘Arab Spring’ in 2011, most notably in Libya until the death of Gaddafi, and Syria (ongoing at the time of publication), Sudan was the only country in which there was a fresh outbreak of violence in 2010; that violence was such that it placed the country alongside Somalia as one of the two most violent countries in Africa. In its 2010 conflict classification, the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research places Somalia and Sudan in the closed circle of countries at war, along with Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and, more surprisingly, Mexico, where the cartel war is said to have caused the death of more than 10,000 people in 2010.<sup>37</sup>

Those wars of passion have been the direct and indirect cause of an exorbitant number of civilian victims and humanitarian disasters, on a scale not seen since World War II.<sup>38</sup> As with failed states – for example, the former Soviet republics – the African conflicts in Rwanda, Sudan, Liberia, and the Congo, to name but a few, were first the outcome of incompetent (and corrupt), tyrannical, or even perverse political governance – often all three at once – and thus combined weak government with political or police violence.<sup>39</sup> With regard to the global political map, while democracy (and with it ‘good governance’) has made noteworthy progress in recent decades, at least until 2005 – and even if the causal chain linking the two cannot be taken for granted – many countries in the world are governed badly and ultimately have political regimes that are bound to fail, leading to risks of internal crises and the emergence of armed factions contesting power or a territory.

37 HIIK, ‘Conflict Barometer’, above note 13.

38 The study of international relations follows the tradition of eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinking with, on the one hand, a Kantian vision driven by an ideal and, on the other, a realist vision inspired by the British thinking of Hobbes, Hume, and Locke. The result is a fundamental dichotomy between two traditions that are nonetheless the fruit of a rational comparison of relations between state entities. It was not until recently that the emotional and irrational aspects of international politics, the dangers of which had first been perceived by Jean-Jacques Rousseau with his intuitive genius, had been studied. On this subject, see the brilliant essay by Dominique Moïsi, *The Geopolitics of Emotion: How Cultures of Fear, Humiliation, and Hope are Reshaping the World*, Anchor, New York, 2010.

39 In civil war, a distinction is made between the concept of ‘indirect’ warfare, i.e. in which the violence is perpetrated solely by an armed group, and ‘direct’ warfare, in which the civilians are in collusion with an armed group. See Laia Balcells, ‘Continuation or politics by two means: direct and indirect violence in civil war’, in *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 55, No. 3, June 2011, pp. 397–422.

More disconcerting are the figures for the past five years; according to the surveys conducted by Freedom House, there is a decrease in global freedom that seems to worsen each year and is accompanied by a decline in the world's democratic institutions and mechanisms.<sup>40</sup>

Nonetheless, and until we see the final outcome of the 'Arab Spring', a Sudan- or Congo-style crisis does not seem to be likely in the near future. Yet vigilance needs to be maintained: a serious crisis could spread quickly from small, partly extinct, hotbeds of violence, such as in Nigeria, where inter-ethnic (and religious) tensions are smouldering just below the surface, or in Central Asia, and especially in Kirghizstan and Uzbekistan, where the perversity of political borders conceals the ethnic borders between Kirghiz and Uzbek nationals and is set against a backdrop of political manipulation.<sup>41</sup>

## Powerlessness in the face of war

Surprisingly, especially given the profound changes that have turned our world and our societies upside down over the past twenty years with, notably, a geopolitical realignment that put an end to the centuries-old Western hegemony, the geostrategic assessment of conflicts and of those participating, despite the phenomenon of 'new wars', shows them to be in decline in relation to the size and extent of current changes. Compared with the preceding eras, which were unable to manage their own changes properly, starting with those in the first half of the twentieth century, the bellicosity of the era in which we live is undisputedly far less severe, in terms of temperaments, words, and deeds. However, two things shock us profoundly. The first is the resilience of war, which sometimes assumes its most barbarous form, although after 1945 we swore to do everything we could to eradicate it or at least to mitigate its effects or to keep it under control. The second observation that attracts our attention is the inequality in the face of war; there are protected areas and others that are extremely vulnerable, while the privileged countries are unable to provide any real help to protect the most vulnerable against this scourge. It is that very powerlessness that offends our conscience, which was nurtured by the spirit of Enlightenment and its twofold input of reason and progress.

Although we can be pleased that these 'new wars' have not (yet) really overturned the established order, it is disheartening to note that many long-lasting conflicts have still not been resolved and to see that the international arms trade, including trade in light weapons, is flourishing more than ever. In 2011, the world was armed, and the indicators suggest that the trend is highly unlikely to be reversed in the years ahead: according to the most recent SIPRI data, the global transfer

40 This is the most sustained decline for forty years. *Freedom in the World 2011*, Freedom House, Washington, DC, 2011.

41 The likelihood of civil war breaking out seems greater if a conflict has already taken place within the previous two years. See Michael Bleaney and Arcangelo Dimico, 'How different are the correlates of onset and continuation of civil wars?', in *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 48, No. 2, March 2011, pp. 145–155.

of weapons (conventional weapons) increased in volume by 24% in the 2006–2010 period compared with 2001–2005.<sup>42</sup>

We can perhaps therefore see 2011 as a key date, witnessing the end of a decade marked by a twofold threat that is both burdensome and virtual – transnational terrorism and the spread of nuclear weapons – and that has not ultimately led to anything tangible or fostered the emergence of armed groups that are likely to undermine the geopolitical status quo. Only the two wars, those in Iraq and Afghanistan, caused by the terrorist threat – albeit by political choice rather than by strategic necessity – could in the end provide a scenario similar to that seen after the withdrawal of the USSR from Afghanistan, with the deployment of mujahideen in various countries. To date, nothing has been written in that area and there is nothing to suggest that that history is likely to be repeated.

It may therefore be observed that, on the fringe of new wars, numerous intra-state conflicts today, along with the non-state armed groups taking part in them, are the legacy of old, unresolved, or badly resolved conflicts that have gone on for several decades and continue from one year to the next because the particular circumstances are such that this can occur in places where similar conflicts have long since come to an end. Moreover, the example of Sri Lanka, with the defeat of the Tamil Tigers, recently showed that a government that is prepared to stop at nothing, not even a blood bath, is likely to finish off a guerrilla force, even if it is tenacious and well organized. However, a democratic country such as Colombia, for example, could in no way use such methods, regardless of the stakes. Our judgements must nonetheless be tempered with caution, as new conflicts very often emerge from the ashes of former badly resolved conflicts, which, with the contribution of new elements, may erupt brutally and without warning, sometimes on a far larger scale.

After the end of the golden age of Marxist-Leninist guerrilla forces, are we now witnessing the end of another era, that of ‘transnational terrorism’, which, incidentally, will have declined in operational terms compared with traditional guerrilla forces? That is possible, given that as in every era – that of post-1945 independence having itself given rise to conflicts (1948) that are still ongoing (Near East or India–Pakistan) – the 2000s have produced their share of small jihadist groups that are armed to a greater or lesser extent. Like Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, these groups will find it difficult to survive but will perhaps do so for some time as a local or regional disruptive force that has no real impact on the political events in areas in which they operate. However, the recent emergence of Maoist or other armed groups – in India or Paraguay, for example – could reverse the trend back towards Marxist-inspired ideologies.

42 See Paul Holtom, Lucie Béraud-Sudreau, Mark Bromley, Pieter D. Wezeman, and Siemon T. Wezeman, *Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2010*, Stockholm, SIPRI Fact Sheet, March 2011, available at: <http://books.sipri.org/files/FS/SIPRIFS1103a.pdf> (lasted visited 11 November 2011).

On a completely different note, the war in the DRC has created an environment that is conducive to anarchy in some parts of the country,<sup>43</sup> which are under the control of armed groups that are both dangerous and uncontrollable; it is also difficult to see how they could rapidly disarm and reintegrate their members into a society that is still completely in tatters. This type of conflict could arise elsewhere in an unexpected and surprising manner, and is at present less easy to avoid, control, or resolve rapidly because the international mechanisms for resolving conflicts, whether they are unofficial (the interests of the leading powers) or official (such as those of the UN and other organizations of collective regional security), have not changed appreciably over the past fifteen years, if not longer. The quantity of arms currently on the market, multiplied by the increasing activity of transnational criminal organizations, could contribute further to bolstering the rival factions that might emerge in a war of this kind, where, logically, the degree of violence and destruction of all kinds, including among civilians, would inevitably be very high. The example of the 2011 revolutions suggests that we should be extremely cautious and fairly unassuming about determining the areas where such conflicts could break out in the future. However, by dint of focusing too much on dangers that are apparent but almost virtual, such as those linked to the spread of nuclear weapons, one forgets to examine more closely the invisible dangers that lie in wait and are ready to erupt, catching us totally unawares. During the period of Zaïre's decline at the end of the reign of Mobutu Sese Seko, one certainty was shared by all, the people and the embassies – that the post-Mobutu period was likely to be very unsettled and even violent, like the period following the poorly negotiated independence of 1960. Nonetheless, the only measures adopted in Washington, Paris, or elsewhere were to delay as far as possible the inevitable outcome, with the known disaster in humanitarian terms as the result, as was stressed somewhat cynically by the great theologian Reinhold Niebuhr: 'Perhaps the most significant moral characteristic of a nation is its hypocrisy'.<sup>44</sup>

What seems less likely is a multiplication of the type of anarchy prevalent in some parts of the Horn of Africa, providing a spectacle that is at least surprising and that has involved the upsurge over the past few years of a scourge that was thought to have died out: large-scale piracy. That activity seems to have been gaining a strong foothold in an area where commercial (and pleasure) shipping is risky if not downright dangerous.<sup>45</sup> According to the International Maritime Bureau, 998 sailors were taken hostage in 2010 in that one region, which nonetheless covers a sizeable area, twice that of Europe.<sup>46</sup>

43 René Lemarchand rightly emphasizes regional interdependence and its impact on violence in the Great Lakes region. See René Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, PA, 2009.

44 Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Scribner, New York, 1932, p. 95.

45 To put the global threat of piracy in Somalia in perspective, see the interesting article by J. Peter Pham, 'Putting Somali piracy in context', in *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 3, July 2010, pp. 325–341.

46 The IMB's data are updated regularly and can be viewed at: <http://www.icc-ccs.org/piracy-reporting-centre/piracynewsfigures> (last visited 11 November 2011).

This is one of the rare cases in which the internal instability of a country, Somalia, has repercussions beyond the borders of a state or group of states. Government inability to consolidate its hold on the country is only equal to the inability of the Islamist armed groups to unseat a regime that has its back to the wall. Here, as elsewhere, the rivalry between armed groups – in this case, the al-Shabab and Hizbul Islam militias – helps to weaken the centres of power while nurturing hotbeds of violence. We need to recall that, in Somalia, these movements have attacked not only the central power (the transitional federal government) but also the forces of the African Union; they have moreover become established in other countries, particularly in Uganda, where al-Shabab claimed responsibility for a terrorist attack in 2010. The development of piracy is encouraged by the militia, who see it as a means of acquiring weapons and human reinforcements from outside the country. Population displacements caused by the war and the difficulty of acquiring aid from outside are helping to deepen the humanitarian crisis logically affecting the country.

The case of Somalia must not, however, be allowed to conceal the fact that the long list of armed groups detected throughout the world consists predominantly of small, weak, or virtually non-existent groups whose political weight is insignificant and whose disruptive capacity is limited. Some, such as the Shining Path in Peru, still exist but have long since lost their operational capacities along with their influence. Contrary to the dictates of common sense, the lack or the disappearance of any opportunity to achieve the desired or proclaimed objectives does not prompt the armed groups to lay down arms. Hence the fact that some small groups survive, sometimes for many years, without leadership and without means, almost out of habit, to end up ingloriously as a mere internet interface. The use of the weapon of terrorism, which has grown over the past ten years, is not so much attributable to the fact that many movements are incapable of attacking the regular armed forces directly or indirectly as to the fact that, particularly among jihadist movements, this approach has been in keeping with the times since the global shock caused by the attacks on 11 September 2001. The possible resurgence of Marxist-inspired movements, which tend to operate in rural areas, could prompt, at some future date, a return to conventional guerrilla tactics that are more in keeping with those movements' approach and historical background.

## The new age of minorities

Whereas the cold war period was the setting for intra-state conflicts in secondary countries (in a geopolitical sense), today it is the 'emerging' (or, more correctly, 're-emerging') nation-continent, in other words the new major powers of the future, that are more affected by internal wars, mostly in areas seeking their autonomy or independence, stemming from minorities that are sometimes politically oppressed or demographically outnumbered. That applies, of course, to China and India. Those two countries each have a long and complex historical past, major cultural significance, and regimes that range from liberal autocracy to democracy. The

'shattered empire' whose potential for conflict in the Soviet Union was quickly perceived by Hélène Carrère d'Encausse,<sup>47</sup> also has its equivalent in China, especially in Tibet and Sinkiang, where, despite sporadic violence, the central authority seems for the moment to be more or less in control of events.

Since its independence, India has been faced with this kind of violence but the country's ethnic diversity and political complexity, not to mention its particular geographical characteristics, have led to a situation that is far more complicated than in neighbouring China.<sup>48</sup> For the moment, there is nothing to indicate that the various fairly large insurrectional movements, of which there are dozens, that are challenging the authority in power in several parts of the country – from Kashmir to the border with Bangladesh – are ready to lay down their weapons. Far from it. Nor is there anything to indicate that the central government is planning to make any sizeable concessions.

Contrary to the current trend involving the spread of militant Islamist groups that are particularly active in urban areas, the most dangerous insurrectional movement in India at present is Maoist in inspiration. Active in 90 of the 636 districts that make up the country, the Naxalite movement (which takes its name from the village of Naxalbari, which was the scene of a peasant revolt) numbers between 15,000 and 20,000 combatants with as many weapons and has a substantial base of sympathizers in a primarily rural area in the centre/north-east of the country.<sup>49</sup> Whereas in 2009 the conflict between the forces of order and the Naxalites fell just short of the crucial threshold of 1,000 victims, it exceeded it in 2010, with nearly 1,200 deaths recorded. Based in two states, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, the Naxalites are successfully extending their operational bases to other areas. In the coming years, this movement, which is a very recent development although its origins date back to the 1960s, is very likely to present Indian governments with substantial problems, particularly as the movement's leaders, who apply Mao's principles of guerrilla warfare to the letter, are involved in an extended war that is driven by discontented peasant masses. The seriousness of the situation has not escaped the attention of the Indian government, which recently set up a special force whose task is to tip the balance in favour of the state. The force will have its hands full but it will always be able to draw on the British experience as set forth by C. E. Callwell more than a century ago in his treatise on 'small wars'.<sup>50</sup> The particular character of those wars, where the two opposing camps each seek to win the support of the rural people, has frequently placed civilians at the heart of the

47 Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, *L'Empire éclaté*, Flammarion, Paris, 1978.

48 The profound difference between the two political cultures needs to be emphasized, particularly the centralized, secular, and uncontested nature of that in China as opposed to India. See the comparative analysis of the evolution of those societies by Francis Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2011.

49 See, for example, William Magioncalda, 'A modern insurgency: India's evolving Naxalite problem', in *South Asia Monitor*, No. 140, Washington, DC, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 8 April 2010.

50 Charles E. Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principle and Practice*, Book Jungle, 2009. A particular discovery or rediscovery of the 2000s has been the book by David Galula in which he draws on his own experience in the French army: *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, Praeger, Westport, CT, 1964.

fighting, with the inevitable consequences in humanitarian terms.<sup>51</sup> To avoid falling into certain traps, the Indian government would do well to look closely at the history of Colombia over the past forty years.

For the past ten years or so, another large country in the region, Indonesia, has been taking active part in the anti-insurrectional fighting that followed the attacks in Bali in 2002, which claimed more than 200 lives and left as many wounded. Despite its efforts, the Indonesian government was unable to prevent the recent emergence of a new jihadist rebel movement, 'Lintas Tanzim'.<sup>52</sup> This conflict has been added to a far older one (dating from 1949) between the government and the West Papua liberation movement.

However, Pakistan is where the situation is by far the most volatile, not only from the regional point of view but also from a global perspective. Besides the problem of Afghanistan, which is largely spilling over into the internal and external affairs of the country, and besides the fact that the country has the atomic bomb, the central government is pitted against Islamist groups in a war that has already lasted a decade and has intensified in the past four years; it has already claimed nearly 7,000 victims. Although, as elsewhere, the government is unlikely to fall, as a result of force, into the hands of those groups, the violence of the conflict between the forces of order could further destabilize a country that seems to teeter constantly on the edge of chaos.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, following the marked trend in recent years that led to the emergence in numerous countries in Africa, Asia, and the Arabian Peninsula of small militant Islamist groups that have not hesitated to make use of the weapon of terrorism, we may now be witnessing a rebirth of more conventional guerrilla movements, whose operational density is often far greater and whose ultimate consequences in humanitarian terms are far more serious than sporadic attacks, which, although spectacular and abhorrent, cause far fewer victims. As every time period adds a further layer of conflicts of varying degrees of violence to those in preceding periods, we may well be at the dawn of a new era of numerous armed conflicts. Once again, it would be good to ponder seriously the mechanisms capable of preventing or at least curbing those future conflicts, which are highly likely to trigger a new wave of human disasters. As ever, growing economic inequalities and, in particular, the unenviable fate of many minorities throughout the world lie at the heart of the problem. Whereas a region such as Europe, which was for a long time the planet's first conflict zone, seems to have entered into a kind of eternal peace, elsewhere the future of war is not compromised, the same being true of armed

51 In-depth studies show that violence against civilians in the post-cold-war period is explosive, with a succession of high and low cycles. See Kristine Eck and Lisa Hultman, 'One-sided violence against civilians in war', in *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 44, No. 2, March 2007, pp. 233–246.

52 International Crisis Group, 'Indonesia: Jihadi surprise in Aceh', in *Asia Report*, No. 189, April 2010.

groups spoiling for a fight and of industrialists and arms dealers keen to supply them – and their opponents – with the means of fighting. For states that no longer have a ‘monopoly’ on the use of force (or even the legitimacy), the technological response, a sort of Holy Grail that is permanently out of reach, is still far from sufficient as a response to the new threats, although, in terms of imagery and weapon precision (notably thanks to drones<sup>53</sup>), some of the advanced weapons constitute substantial advantages. However, the governments’ intrinsic politico-strategic vulnerability – particularly in democracy, which goes hand in hand with the tactical vulnerability of their armies, even the most sophisticated (the vulnerability, for example, of the army helicopters<sup>54</sup>) – is unable to discourage twenty-first century guerrilla fighters, who are still finding large political and territorial areas where they can exert their hold through the world and on the world. The fear of setting a precedent that would open a new Pandora’s box is also slowing the ardour of the armies with state-of-the-art tools: hence Washington’s decision not to make use of cyber warfare techniques against Colonel Gaddafi in spring 2011.<sup>55</sup>

A mere two hundred years ago, the great Napoleon, having brought Europe to its knees, found himself utterly helpless in the face of a handful of Spanish guerrilla fighters. Whereas the Napoleonic model of classic warfare with its unities of time, space, and place – a long campaign culminating in a major battle and leading to peace treaties – has been left well and truly behind, and whereas the terrorist threat and that of the spread of nuclear weapons seem to be under control, guerrilla warfare, in new forms and following new taxonomic schemes, is very likely to become the most common type of armed conflict in the coming decades, thus underscoring the current trend. And, regardless of form or countenance, the dynamics of guerrilla warfare systematically rely on a fundamental axis that constitutes the conflict’s primary interest, and which eventually becomes its hostage: the people.

53 The reports on the impact of drones, particularly in Pakistan, are circumspect. See ‘L’utilisation de drones au Pakistan n’a pas d’effets sur la guerre’, in *Le Monde*, 26 February 2010, and *The Year of the Drone*, 2011, compiled by The New America Foundation and available at: <http://counterterrorism.newamerica.net/drones#2011> (last visited 11 November 2011).

54 For example, the blowing apart of the US Chinook helicopter in full flight on 6 August 2011, killing thirty-eight victims, most of whom were Navy Seals, was the most murderous incident since the start of the United States’ intervention in Afghanistan.

55 See Eric Schmitt and Thom Shanker, ‘U.S. weighted use of cyberattacks to weaken Libya’, in *New York Times*, 18 October 2011, p. A1.