

Next Year's Wars

The 16 brewing conflicts to watch for in 2011.

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Across the globe today, you'll find almost **three dozen** raging conflicts, from the valleys of Afghanistan to the jungles of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the streets of Kashmir. But what are the next crises that might erupt in 2011? Here are a few worrisome spots that make our list.



Côte d'Ivoire

Côte d'Ivoire is on the brink of what may be a very bad 2011. After a five-year delay, Côte d'Ivoire held presidential elections on Oct. 31. A peaceful first round of voting was commended by the international community, but the runoff between incumbent Laurent Gbagbo and former Prime Minister Alassane Ouattara was **marred by clashes** and allegations of fraud on both sides.

The international community, including the United Nations, the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), former colonial power France, and the United States, has recognized Ouattara as the victor, but this has not prevented Gbagbo, with the backing of senior military officials and the Constitutional Council, from taking the oath of office. Both politicians have named prime ministers and governments as tension mounts and protests occur in the streets. The United Nations has reported disappearances, rape, and at least two dozen deaths so far.

Worst case scenario: Gbagbo stays in power, armed conflict between the supporters of each side plunges the country into civil war. Best case scenario: Gbagbo succumbs to international appeals and steps down. But it's not clear how things could get better from here. The international community has already ratcheted up pressure, including financial

restrictions and travel bans. And the United Nations **renewed** the mandate of its peacekeeping operation there, despite Gbagbo calling for its immediate departure. It's very possible that Cote d'Ivoire will take a turn for the worse in 2011. Gbagbo and Ouattara both have heavily armed supporters who seem ready to fight for the long haul.

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Colombia

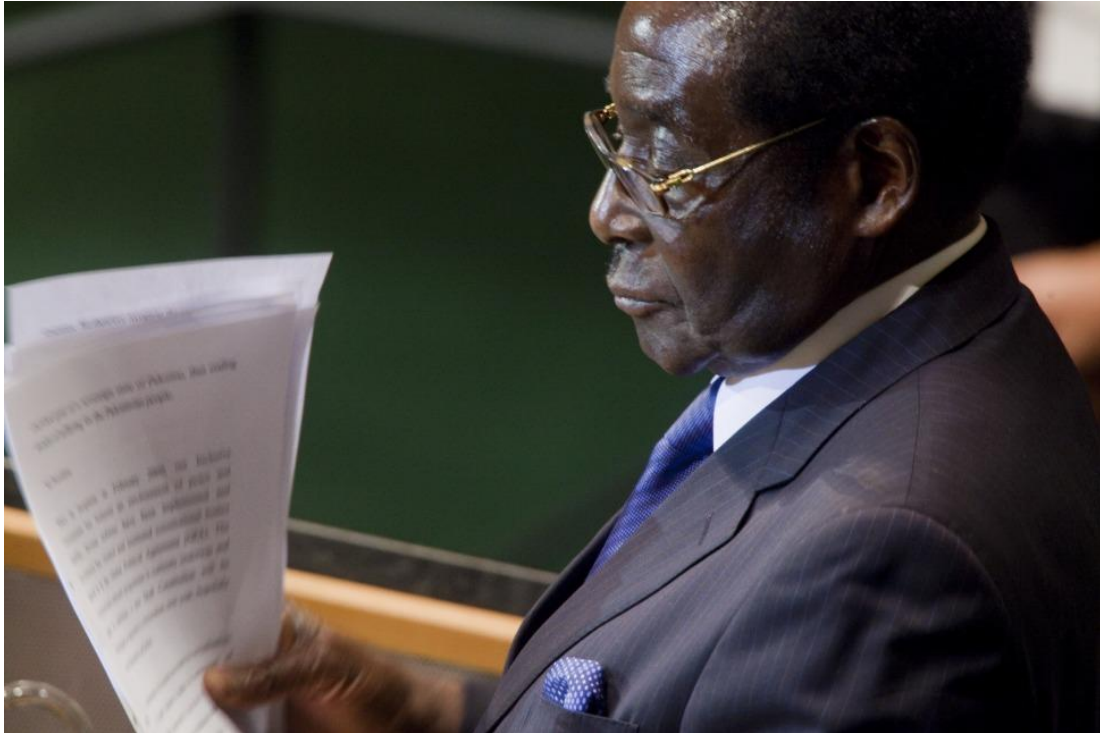
At first glance, Colombia's prospects for 2011 look **bright**. The country's new president, Juan Manuel Santos, has surprised many former critics with his bold reform proposals, many of which are aimed at addressing the root causes of the country's 46-year civil conflict against leftist rebels. He has mended relations with neighbouring **Venezuela** and **Ecuador**, committed to protect human rights advocates, and proposed legislation to help resettle the country's four million displaced.

The news is not all good, however. Despite a series of strategic losses in recent years -- from territory to key leadership -- the country's leftist guerrillas, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (**FARC**), still maintain about 8,000 armed troops and perhaps twice that number of supporters. The rebels killed some 30 police in the weeks after Santos's inauguration, clearly to make a point. Meanwhile, new illegal armed groups have sprung up

to capture the drug trafficking market, their ranks filled with former paramilitary fighters. These gangs are largely responsible for the rising incidence of urban violence; homicide rates have gone up by over 100 percent in Colombia's second city, Medellín, last year. If these new armed groups are not contained, Colombia stands to regress in its long fight to finally root out the drug trade -- and the militancy it fuels. In such a scenario, FARC could see a comeback, restarting its campaign of terror in the country's major cities. As has been the case so often in Colombia's recent history, it would be the civilian population who would suffer most from such a return to conflict.

Yet the opposite scenario is equally likely in the coming months. Santos has worked with his counterparts in Venezuela and Ecuador to increase border surveillance, putting pressure on illegal armed groups holed up there. Under such pressure, FARC may even welcome the chance to start talks with the government about disarmament and reintegration. Much rests in this government's hands.

LUIS ROBAYO/AFP/Getty Images



Zimbabwe

Keep an eye on Zimbabwe in 2011 as the country's "unity" government -- joining longtime President Robert Mugabe with opposition leader **Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai** - will warrant its conciliatory name less and less by the day. The flashpoint next year? Elections. Both men want to hold them -- but they don't agree about what Zimbabweans should be voting on.

Mugabe and Tsvangirai were never going to be fast friends. Since the two were brought together in February 2009, following a **2008 election** that Tsvangirai won (but his opponent refused to recognize), Mugabe has continued to monopolize the real levers of power. Despite Tsvangirai's protests, it's Mugabe who still holds sway over the army, the security forces, and all the state functions that generate revenue.

Earlier this fall, Mugabe declared that he wanted the unity government to end in 2011. He wants full elections mid-next year, and his party, ZANU-PF, is giving every indication that it will employ the same coercive tactics used in elections past to deliver victory to Mugabe. Tsvangirai's idea of the 2011 ballot is quite different: he wants to pass a new constitution.

The row over elections has pushed the nominal two-year truce between Mugabe and Tsvangirai toward the verge of collapse. Open violence could break out around the elections

unless regional and international mediators negotiate a compromise and bring real pressure to bear on Mugabe to play by the rules.

Michael Nagle/Getty Images



Iraq

Iraq today is in far better shape than it was in 2007, when nearly **two dozen** Iraqis were dying each day in suicide bombings. But it's still far from out of the woods. And these days, it's not militants but the country's politics that post the biggest threat. The **new government**, formed in December after nine months of wrangling, is weak and lacks the institutions to rule effectively. Iraq's bureaucracies are nascent and fragile, and its security forces remain heavily dependent on U.S. training as well as logistics and intelligence support. Meanwhile, grievances abound -- from minority groups to repatriated refugees -- and it is unlikely that the state will be able to appease these many political demands. Sectarian violence resurfaces in fits and spurts, and is far from quashed entirely; **approximately 300** Iraqis died in violence in November.

Iraq's neighbors could exploit the country's ongoing political turmoil to gain influence and sway, particularly Iran, which has long supported Shiite militants. Insurgents also await an opportunity to capitalize on political discord. At the same time, U.S. troops will be largely --

if not entirely -- withdrawn by the end of next year. And lacking that safety net, it would take very little for the country to lapse back into conflict.

That course is not inevitable, however. More likely, Iraq will continue on its current trajectory, retaining enough stability to keep its citizens relatively safe, even if services remain deficient. But in a muddle-through scenario, it may be the best the country can reasonably hope for as it **emerges** from an 8-year U.S. occupation.

ALI AL-SAAD/AFP/Getty Images



Venezuela

Over the next 12 months, watch for Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez to take his brand of 21st-century socialism to the extremes. Having lost his majority in Parliament in **September**, Chávez has since been working hard to ensure that the new, opposition legislature will be irrelevant by the time it is sworn in in January. The Venezuelan president has consolidated control over the military and police, seized more private companies, and won temporary "**decree powers**" from the outgoing, pro-government National Assembly. Chávez's power grab comes as the country's **economic**, social, and security problems are mounting. Violence has spiked dramatically in urban areas; there were some 19,000 homicides in 2009 out of a population of 28 million. In recent years, Venezuela has become

a major drug-trafficking corridor, home to foreign and domestic cartels alike. State security forces have also been accused of participating in criminal activity. Meanwhile, Chávez has escalated -- rather than soothed -- the situation with fiery, partisan rhetoric that seems to egg on a violent suppression of the opposition. That message has an audience; government-allied street gangs in Caracas stand ready to defend his revolution with Kalashnikovs.

MIGUEL GUTIERREZ/AFP/Getty Images



Sudan

The fate of Sudan in 2011 will be set early, on January 9, when a referendum on southern self-determination is scheduled to take place, and which will likely result in independence for the south. **Two decades of war** came to an end in Sudan in 2005 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). But as the agreement enters its last stages, however, that delicate peace will be tested. While securing the referendum has been an international priority, the long-term stability of the region relies on the ability of north and south Sudan to forge a positive post-CPA relationship.

If matters go well, the January referendum will take place smoothly, with its results respected by the government in Khartoum. This would provide the perfect platform for negotiations on post-referendum arrangements to be successfully concluded. But should

the vote go poorly, we might witness the reignition of conflict between north and south and an escalation of violence in Darfur, all of which could potentially draw in regional states. At this point, nothing is certain.

Finally, there's the **tricky matter** of creating a new, independent Southern Sudan, which many are already dubbing a pre-failed state. The border remains undecided -- no small matter since the contested middle ground happens to sit on a large oil field. Meanwhile in Juba, the nascent capital, institutions and services would urgently need to be built from scratch.

ASHRAF SHAZLY/AFP/Getty Images



Mexico

It has been four years since Mexican President Felipe Calderón **declared war** on the country's drug lords. During that time, 30,000 people have fallen victim to the conflict, many of them along the northern border with the United States, largely as a result of infighting among rival gangs vying for control of trafficking corridors. Today, Ciudad Juarez, a border city near Texas, competes with Caracas as the most deadly city in the world. Over

the last 12 months, the violence has spread to Mexico's economic and cultural hubs that were once considered immune from drug infiltration. To the north, Mexico's organized crime routes now reach into nearly every metropolitan area of the United States. In short, despite a \$400 million annual aid package from the United States, and big boosts in funding for the military, it's far from clear whether the government of Mexico is winning -- or can win -- this battle.

During the last year in particular, Calderón has been criticized for the conduct of the narco war. Not only is it difficult to pinpoint clear progress, but for many, life has visibly deteriorated since the crackdown began. Twenty times more Mexicans have died during the last four years than Americans have in the entire war in Afghanistan. Two gubernatorial candidates and 11 mayors have been assassinated. The press is under increasing pressure to self-censor. One paper in Ciudad Juárez went as far as asking, in an **open letter** to the cartels, what it was that they were allowed to publish.

"Winning" would require a hard look at the Mexican military and police, which have been **credibly accused** of committing flagrant abuses while fighting the drug gangs. The judicial system likewise needs strengthening to bring the guilty to fair trial. And, of course, much depends on Mexico's northern neighbor: America remains the largest market for drugs in the world, and so long as U.S. users demand product, the cartels will keep the supply flowing.

Spencer Platt/Getty Images



Guatemala

Mexico's drug war is also sending shockwaves throughout Latin America. Under pressure from the Mexican state, the most infamous cartels are seeking friendlier ground and finding it in Guatemala, where the state is weak and the institutions are fragile. In the worst case scenario for 2011, Guatemala could be host to a perpetual turf war of attrition between these various cartels, all competing to control drug trafficking routes -- and increasingly human-trafficking corridors -- to the United States.

So far, Guatemala's best ally in fighting back has been the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), a tribunal-like institution set up to root out corrupt and cartel-tainted officials. But its **mandate** ends in 2011 and its star prosecutor recently resigned, claiming that the political leadership was thwarting his work. Presidential elections are slotted for August, but early polls suggest a polarized nation, with around 20 candidates and no clear front runner. That's just the sort of uncertainty that cartels are good at exploiting.

JOHAN ORDONEZ/AFP/Getty Images



Haiti

Nature had it in for Haiti in 2010, but it may be politics that batters the small island country in the coming year. The poorest country in the Western Hemisphere began the year with a devastating January earthquake that killed more than 300,000, a deadly cholera outbreak, and a tortuously slow reconstruction process, which remains way off the pace and beset with difficulties. A November 28 **presidential election**, which should have led to the election of a new, legitimate government, remains wedged in an impasse over allegations of fraud. The winner won't be decided until a run-off vote is held in January, but protests have already erupted over what some saw as the unfair exclusion of certain candidates in the second round. At least a dozen lives have been lost in the street clashes so far.

Already, Haiti was on the verge of a social breakdown. Today, more than 1 million Haitians remain homeless in the ruined capital. The government, whose ranks and infrastructure were devastated by the earthquake, has no **capacity** to deliver services or provide security. And international aid groups and U.N. peacekeepers can only plug those gaps temporarily. Relief work has also been hampered by a lack of funding. Despite big promises from international donors, dollars have been slow to trickle into the country.

This precarious situation will make for an enormous challenge if and when a new government does at last come to power next year. The run-off election will mark a year since the earthquake, with little improvement in the everyday lives of Haitians, whose patience is running out.



Tajikistan

Tajikistan, a land of striking beauty, grinding poverty, and rapacious leaders, could well become the next stomping ground for guerrillas -- Central Asians and other Muslims from the former Soviet Union -- who have been fighting alongside the Taliban for years and may now be thinking of returning home to settle scores with the region's brutal and corrupt leaders.

Run since 1992 by Emomali Rahmon, a post-Soviet strongman, Tajikistan has been hollowed out by top-to-bottom corruption. A U.S. diplomatic **cable** released by WikiLeaks has an American diplomat noting that "From the President down to the policeman on the street, government is characterized by cronyism and corruption. Rahmon and his family

control the country's major businesses, including the largest bank, and they play hardball to protect their business interests, no matter the cost to the economy writ large."

Not surprisingly in such an environment, most public services -- including the health system -- have all but collapsed. The economy survives on remittances from migrant laborers in Russia, and roughly half of the country's population lives below the poverty line. It is a dangerous brew for instability.

In recent months, the Tajik government has attempted to crack down against Islamist insurgent groups who have crossed the border from northern Afghanistan, but to little effect. There is rising concern in Washington that Tajikistan will become the new theater of operations for Islamic militants, and might offer a convenient route for insurgent penetration of other volatile or vulnerable parts of Central Asia -- first off, Tajikistan's desperately weak neighbor, Kyrgyzstan.

In the coming year, it's easy to imagine Tajikistan sliding further and further toward a failed state as the government quietly cedes control of whole sections of the country to militants. Even if the Afghan militants were out of the picture, however, Tajikistan's democratic prospects would look bleak. As the American cable put it, "The government is not willing to reform its political process."



Pakistan

It's hard to remember a time when Pakistan didn't seem on the brink of collapse. This coming year will likely be no exception. The country faces a humanitarian crisis in its mid-section where floods displaced 10 million people, a security threat from terrorist groups operating on Pakistani soil, and political instability from a weak administration still trying to wield civilian control over the all-powerful military.

The most immediate priority is assisting the millions of people who are still displaced following floods in Pakistan's countryside. The cities could also use attention; 2010 saw the biggest spike in urban terrorist attacks since the war next door in Afghanistan started. Insurgent and terrorist groups now have strongholds not just in the northwestern tribal belt bordering Afghanistan, but in urban centers such as Islamabad, Karachi, Quetta, and Lahore. Yet despite the flurry of attacks on its heartland, Pakistan still seems **reluctant** to confront the insurgents with full force. So far, military operations against terrorist groups have vacillated between the extremes -- either heavy-handed and haphazard force or ill-conceived peace deals. Further, the criminal justice system has failed totally to preempt, investigate, and convict militants. Violence may well spike again in 2011.

Meanwhile in Islamabad, the civilian leadership under President **Asif Ali Zardari** has grown unpopular and weak, plagued by corruption and an inability to maintain control of the military leaders. Civilian control over national security policy, in both the domestic and external domains, could help put the criminal genie back in the bottle. Stronger civilian leadership of the humanitarian agenda would also prevent the millions living in regions devastated by the massive monsoon floods of 2010 -- in the conflict-hit zones in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and also in the Pakistani heartland -- from becoming a soft target for militants. However, clashes between the judiciary and Zardari, and the military's propensity to destabilize elected governments, could result in the democratic transition faltering and even failing, with grave consequences for an already fragile state.

RIZWAN TABASSUM/AFP/Getty Images



Somalia

If Somalia keeps **heading south** in 2011, the entire country could fall under Islamist insurgent control. Up to now, the country's U.N.-backed transitional government has withstood attacks from Islamist insurgents only thanks to protection from an **African**

Union peacekeeping force; it remains weak and divided, a national government in name alone. Further, the capital city of Mogadishu is under perpetual siege by militants, a reality that has sent millions fleeing from their homes in this year alone. When the government does make gains on the insurgents, they are counted in mere city blocks, captured one by one.

The largest and most alarming insurgent group is al Shabab, which professes to desire the creation of a strict, conservative Muslim state and portions of whose leadership pledged allegiance to al Qaeda in early 2010. The group already controls most of southern and central Somalia and is currently trying to capture Mogadishu. Meanwhile, Somalia's neighbors **fear** that al Shabab will begin to export terrorism, as it did for the first time last summer in a series of bombings in Uganda during the World Cup.

That said, Somaliland in the country's northwest is an island of stability and democracy, and Puntland in the northeast is relatively peaceful, if troubled by Islamists and pirate gangs.

The best hope for Somalia is for its forces to exploit the divisions among the insurgency to recapture territory, particularly in Mogadishu. International support, already forthcoming, will help. But so would a lot of luck.



Lebanon

Still smarting from a war with Israel in 2006 that left a precarious balance of power between Christians and Islamic fundamentalists, Lebanon today is arguably more than ever **on the brink**.

In the coming months, an international tribunal is expected to issue indictments against Hezbollah members for the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister **Rafik Hariri**, a step that could spark sectarian strife throughout the country. Most alarmingly, the indictments could unravel a fragile inter-Lebanese power-sharing agreement reached in Doha in 2008. In that scenario, Lebanon could see a return to political assassinations, all-out sectarian strife, or attempts by Hezbollah to assert greater political or military control. None of these scenarios are far-fetched in the coming year; indeed, they have all happened in Lebanon's very recent past. The fact that it is so hard to imagine both how the current status quo may survive and how exactly it will unravel says volumes about the state of uncertainty and shakiness which afflicts the country.

In addition to Lebanon's internal political unraveling, the country risks sliding back into war with **Israel**. Nearly five years after the 2006 war, relations between the two countries are both exceptionally quiet and uniquely dangerous -- for the same reason: On both sides of Israel's northern border, the build-up in military forces and threats of an all-out war that

would spare neither civilians nor civilian infrastructure, together with the worrisome prospect of its regionalization, have had a deterrent effect on all. Today, none of the parties can soberly contemplate the prospect of a conflict that would come at greater cost to themselves, be more difficult to contain, and be less predictable in outcome than anything they witnessed in the past.

But that is only the better half of the story. Beneath the surface, tensions are mounting with no obvious safety valve. The deterrence regime has helped keep the peace, but the process it perpetuates -- mutually reinforcing military preparations, Hezbollah's growing and more sophisticated arsenal, escalating Israeli threats -- pulls in the opposite direction and could trigger the very result it has averted so far.

ANWAR AMRO/AFP/Getty Images



Nigeria

Nigeria's 2010 was about as rough as they come: The country's president **disappeared** on medical leave -- and then died -- hundreds were killed in sectarian violence between Muslims and Christians in the country's middle belt, and a rebel amnesty in the oil-

producing Niger Delta region completely unraveled, leading to a string of bombing attacks and kidnappings.

And 2011 also looks rocky for Africa's most populous country. A presidential election is slated to be held in the spring; the **last election in 2007** left international observers awestruck by flagrant intimidation and ballot stuffing. Voting in Nigeria has never been a pretty affair, and despite promises to reform the electoral system, the old habits of intimidation and vote buying die hard. After the polling does takes place, post-election turmoil is also entirely possible, particularly if one region or group is unhappy with the result. Nigeria's many regions -- north, south, west, east, and everything in between -- count on office-holders to pass out patronage and favors, so the stakes of losing are high. Whoever it may be, Nigeria's new leader will have urgent tasks ahead. The rebellion in the Niger Delta is flaring up again, with militants promising to continue attacking oil facilities and government offices. A once effective anti-corruption commission has lost its momentum. And vast economic inequality is the order of the day, leaving oil wealth in the hands of a few while the majority of the country's 140 million people languish.



Guinea

Guinea enters 2011 on a hopeful path. In December, the West African country inaugurated its first-ever elected leader, Alpha Condé. After decades of strongman rule, followed by a 2009 coup, this new leadership seems nothing less than **miraculous**.

Yet the back-story offers some sense of just how deep tensions run. After the country's president died in December 2008, a small group of **military leaders** took over, declaring themselves the new leaders of Guinea. So corrupt and ineffectual had the former president been that many welcomed the junta's rule. But it soon became apparent that the military president, Moussa Dadis Camara, was equally inept. The pinnacle of that failure came in September 2009, when his troops massacred over 150 peaceful protestors in a local stadium.

International condemnation flooded the country, putting pressure on the junta to hold elections. Meanwhile, Camara was shot by a fellow junta member and sent to Morocco for treatment. His successor, Gen. Sekouba Konate, appointed a civilian interim leader and organized the recent election.

But throughout the junta's brief reign, the military took the opportunity to enrich and entrench its role in the economy, a fact that remains today despite the nominal civilian leadership. Guinea's military now has a strong stake in controlling mineral wealth -- the country is the world's largest producer of bauxite -- and other major industries. In the past, it has used strong-arm tactics to get its way, economically and otherwise, and this old habit will surely die hard. Having tasted the fruits of power under the junta, the military may not so easily return to its barracks.

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Democratic Republic of the Congo

Years after the official end of the Second Congo War, which raged from 1998 to 2003 and was responsible for up to 4.5 million deaths, whole swathes of the enormous Central African country remain in upheaval. In the eastern Kivu provinces, an undisciplined national army battles with rebel groups for territorial control. Amid the frenzy of violence and rape that follows in their path, the world's largest U.N. peacekeeping force is at a loss to protect even those civilians that live close to its bases.

Lurking behind the conflict is Congo's vast natural wealth, the very embodiment of the so-called **resource curse**. Government, militants, private corporations, and local citizens all angle to tap the gold, cobalt, copper, coltan and host of other minerals under the country's soil -- which are focused in the east and south of the country. Meanwhile, the central government lies nearly 1,000 miles to the west, separated from its eastern provinces by impenetrable jungle, a different language, and ethnicity. Rebel groups still roam the eastern border regions, exercising their authority with impunity and cruelty. Neither the government nor rebel groups have the strength to win, but both have the resources to keep fighting indefinitely.

Adding to the misery are appalling humanitarian conditions. Only a third of Congolese in rural areas have access to clean water, an estimated 16,000 children die each year before ever reaching the age of five, and life expectancy has actually fallen by five years since 1990.

Unless the Congolese and regional **governments** try different tactics, there is no end in sight to Congo's troubles. In an ideal world, military campaigns in North and South Kivu provinces would be suspended until better-trained troops can be deployed -- troops that can carry out targeted operations while protecting civilians. Meanwhile, governments in Africa's Great Lakes region should convene a summit and negotiate agreements on economic, land, and population-movement issues. A worst-case scenario would see more of the same: a mosaic of armed groups in eastern Congo continue to fight indefinitely, with civilians paying a terrible price.

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The International Crisis Group (ICG) is an international, non-profit, non-governmental organization whose mission is to prevent and resolve deadly conflicts around the world. The ICG has field-based analysts working in over 50 crisis-affected countries and territories across four continents.