

FROM THE EDITOR

The editor is pleased to present to our readers the special issue of IMEMO journal “Pathways to Peace and Security” – № 1(54), 2018. This is the first collection of articles in Russia devoted to such an extensive set of issues, related to humanitarian aspects of modern armed conflicts, humanitarian support, and human protection in conflict areas. The volume includes twenty articles written by nineteen authors from five countries, including both academic experts and practitioners with extensive work experience at the relevant UN agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and humanitarian NGOs, bodies of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), the International Committee of Military Medicine, civil and military government structures, and the media.

Modern conflicts are smaller in scale and less deadly, in terms of battle-related fatalities, than large interstate conventional wars of much of the 20th century. Overall, global conflict potential in the early 21st century is not on the rise – even as it is hardly in decline either (contrary to a widespread perception of the late 1990s – early 2000s). But do modern conflicts imply less humanitarian damage to the civilian population?

In the recent decades, armed conflicts have undergone multiple changes. Today, they are generally less structured, more complex and fragmented and more easily transnationalized, have blurred borders, and display highly uneven intensity. They involve larger numbers and a wider range of violent participants, most of whom are non-state actors. Conflicts have become both more protracted and more frequently recurring, on-and-off affairs. While these predominantly internal conflicts now more frequently involve external interventions, they are in principle less amenable than classic conventional wars to effective management and stable resolution at all levels of world politics through either military means, or negotiations, or both.

Against this background, analysis of humanitarian consequences of contemporary conflicts does not provide much ground for optimism (see *section 1*). From the humanitarian point of view, factors of particular concern include high recurrence and cyclic nature of conflicts; problems with reaching conclusive conflict outcomes and stable solutions; high remaining level of indiscriminate violence by all parties; growing numbers and diversity of armed non-state actors who now play the lead role in direct and intentional (one-sided) violence against civilians; in addition to direct armed confrontation between combatants, frequent one-sided violence (including ethnic and sectarian cleansing), terrorism, communal violence, and predatory violence by local warlords and power-brokers, mainly directly against civilians and deeply embedded in conflict areas. Overall, no form of violence that directly threatens and targets civilians has been in decline, and some of them are even on the rise, especially in the context of highly intensive and heavily internationalized civil wars in weak or failed states. All this complicates both conflict management and humanitarian work, also from the point of International Humanitarian Law.

In sum, if all civilian fatalities – both incurred as battle-related “collateral damage” in conflict and resulting from one-sided violence against civilians – are combined with other direct physical harm, growing masses of internally displaced persons and refugees, and indirect loss of life and other damage from conflicts (such as hunger, chronic malnutrition, diseases, destruction of and lack of access to basic infrastructure etc.), then there should be no doubt left that modern armed conflicts most heavily and dramatically affect civilian population.

There have also been certain shifts in global perceptions of conflicts and their effects on the population. The growing spread of the concept of human security, with its primary focus on security of the individual and the society at large, rather than just on that of the state, reflects both objective reality (the fact that it is the civilian population that suffers the largest cumulative damage from modern conflicts) and changes in the way humanitarian issues are perceived globally. The intertwined process of globalization and glocalization,

rapid development of modern technologies, information and communications systems and global media, the growing role and scope of responsibilities of international institutions, increasingly active non-governmental sector, cross-border, transnational nature of most security threats, including those that involve organized violence – all this makes it increasingly harder for actors at different levels of world politics to ignore humanitarian aspects and consequences of conflicts, especially mass atrocities and forced displacement, threats of hunger and pandemics etc. Humanitarian issues in the context of armed conflicts have now become a larger part of the agenda of lead international organizations.

The main burden of humanitarian consequences of armed conflicts is borne by countries and regions outside the developed world. At the conceptual level, the link between problems of sustainable development and the negative impact of armed violence on human development has become more professed. In practice, for most developed states and donors conflict-related humanitarian aid remains an “extra”, secondary segment of the broader development assistance (see *section 4*). However, some real achievements in humanitarian support and human protection in conflicts should not be discounted, such as improved food security for vulnerable populations and decline in deaths from mines and unexploded ordnance. This limited progress has been made in the face of new challenges posed to humanitarian workers and organizations by evolving conflict patterns, especially regarding humanitarian access (see *section 1*).

The imperative of human protection, including physical protection of civilians in armed conflicts, has not only been proclaimed in theory, as one of the mainstays of the concept of Responsibility to Protect (see *section 2*), but also gradually becomes part of international policies and practices (*sections 2 and 3*). This problem, however, in principle cannot be solved solely or primarily at the operational level – even by multilateral UN peace support missions and forces, acting with an appropriate UN mandate, not to mention the highly controversial “humanitarian interventions”. No operational involvement or intervention can resolve those basic structural incompatibilities that lead to systematic armed violence against civilians. At the end of the day, it is the progress towards resolving key substantive issues contested in armed conflict that can serve as the most efficient and fundamental strategy to enable, facilitate and ensure human protection on a long-term basis. In the absence of progress toward fundamental conflict resolution, humanitarian support would at best have the effect of temporary pain-relief.

The special issue focuses on these and other salient issues related to humanitarian dimension of contemporary conflicts and conflict management, and humanitarian activity at all levels of the world politics.

The editor would like to extend special thanks to all colleagues at IMEMO (one of the lead research centers in Russia for the study of humanitarian aspects of the world politics and armed conflicts) and our foreign authors from Australia, Canada, France, and India who contributed to this volume, and to the personnel of the ICRC Moscow office (“Humanitarian” center) that has become an indispensable ground for discussions and exchange of views among practitioners and experts on humanitarian issues.

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