

Whilst Westminster and Whitehall have been preoccupied with the General Election and its aftermath, the world has continued to turn. The launch in London of the first Armed Conflict Survey by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) demonstrates what has been going on in the wider world. Nick Watts reports first impressions.

The Survey notes that while in 2008 there were 63 active conflicts which resulted in 56,000 fatalities; in 2014 there were 42 active conflicts which resulted in 180,000 fatalities. The vast majority of the 2014 figure, some 70,000, occurred in Syria. The Survey characterises conflicts as civil wars, insurgencies and other forms of violent unrest. Allied to this is the evolving nature of conflict – as the Survey identifies both international Jihadism and Hybrid warfare as elements of armed conflict in the 21st century.

Besides the fatalities the Survey notes the impact of armed conflict in the form of internally displaced populations and refugees. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees noted that 2013 was the first year since the end of the Second World War that the global number of displaced persons exceeded 50 million.

The Survey notes that the drivers of conflict are a complex mix of local, national and transnational factors. It also notes the connection between armed conflict and weak national institutions. This also feeds into criminality and people trafficking. The current crises of refugees in the Mediterranean and in South East Asia are examples of this. Solving this kind of problem requires all the elements of international statecraft to resolve, not just rescuing distressed people at sea.

The Survey notes that the situation in Ukraine is close to a state on state conflict. By the end of 2014 this conflict had claimed 4,700 lives and led to the displacement of a million people. The current ceasefire continues to hold, but European leaders are still divided on how best to resolve this crisis on their doorstep.

The Survey provides a very useful overview of the situation in the Middle East, with its inter-linked conflicts; and conflicts within conflicts. The nexus between failed states such as Libya and Yemen, international Jihadism and the various proxy wars between Sunni and Shia sponsors takes some untangling. All of this is besides the continuing Israeli-Palestinian dispute.

The Armed Conflict Survey represents a useful guide to developments around the world. It charts how low level conflicts in central and south America and Africa continue to affect countries and populations. Many of these do not grab the worlds headlines, and this Survey puts them back onto the map where they belong.