



CrisisWatch

March Alerts & February 2024 Trends

Our monthly conflict tracker highlights **three conflict risks** amid a chance to reach a ceasefire in **Gaza** in March.

- Israel killed thousands more Palestinians in **Gaza** – bringing the death toll since 7 October to over 30,000 – and continued to restrict aid, which could plunge over half a million into famine. Israel threatened an all-out attack on Rafah in March, which could kill or again displace a huge proportion of the 1.5 million people seeking refuge there unless a ceasefire currently under negotiation can avert the offensive.
- The start of Ramadan in March could see rising tensions in the West Bank, and beyond. In particular, should Israel impose restrictions on Muslim worshippers’ access at Jerusalem’s Al-Aqsa complex, it could fuel violence by Hizbollah or Palestinian armed groups in **Lebanon**, increasing the risk of full-scale war.
- Undeterred by the U.S.-UK bombing campaign, the Houthis in **Yemen** launched near-daily attacks on international shipping in adjacent waters and may further expand their targets. The military build-up along various frontlines could portend a new Houthi offensive against government forces.

CrisisWatch identified **thirteen deteriorations** in February. Notably:

- **Ukraine’s** forces withdrew from the embattled town of Avdiivka in Donetsk region after months of heavy Russian bombardment. The retreat marked a significant setback for Kyiv as its forces felt the sting of waning U.S. support and momentum swung toward Moscow (see this month’s Conflict in Focus).
- Security forces in **Chad** killed Yaya Dillo, a staunch opponent and cousin of transitional President Deby, during a shootout in the capital N’Djamena. The incident laid bare major cracks within the ruling elite ahead of the May presidential election.
- In **DR Congo**, M23 rebels advanced on the strategic town of Sake in North Kivu province amid fierce fighting with the army and allied forces, forcing hundreds of thousands to flee.
- A constitutional crisis erupted in **Senegal** after authorities postponed the presidential election, triggering violent protests and international alarm.
- Disputed results following **Pakistan’s** 8 February national elections triggered protests and deepened the country’s

TRENDS IN FEBRUARY



Deteriorated Situations

Ukraine, Mozambique, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Senegal, Haiti, Chad, South Sudan, Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Burkina Faso



Improved Situations

None

ALERTS FOR MARCH



Conflict Risk Alerts

Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, Yemen



Resolution Opportunities

Israel/Palestine

political crisis, as a surge in militant attacks in the provinces bordering Afghanistan killed dozens.

- Violent protests erupted across **Haiti** calling for acting Prime Minister Ariel Henry's resignation, as gang violence, both between rival outfits and against the government, wreaked havoc in the capital Port-au-Prince.

Aside from the scores of conflict situations we regularly assess, we tracked significant developments in **Moldova, Papua New Guinea** and **South Africa**.

Conflict in Focus

UKRAINE

FEBRUARY / MARCH 2024

What happened in February? As the war in Ukraine entered its third year, Ukrainian forces withdrew from the embattled town of Avdiivka in eastern Donetsk region after months of heavy Russian bombardment. The retreat marked a significant setback for Kyiv. Its forces are feeling the sting of waning U.S. support and momentum has swung toward Moscow.

Why does it matter? Ukraine is at a critical juncture. Its disappointing 2023 counteroffensive, along with lagging defence production and political gridlock over military assistance in Washington, has emboldened Moscow, which remains determined to achieve President Putin's war objectives (ie, the permanent subjugation of Ukraine) and is confident it is on track to do so. If current trends continue, Ukraine and its Western backers face the prospect of a Russian victory, emboldening an increasingly aggressive Moscow and shaking up the European security architecture.

What to watch in the coming weeks and months? With its larger population and greater capacity to produce weapons, as well as its willingness to absorb great costs to its economy and people, Moscow's upper hand is increasingly evident. Following the fall of Avdiivka, Russia has managed to bring several settlements west of the town under its control. Ukraine may well lose more territory here and in other areas in the east and south where Russian forces concentrate their firepower.

Russia's steady drumbeat of missile and drone attacks, helped by stepped-up military cooperation with Iran and North Korea, has stretched Ukraine's air defence sys-

tems. Without a continuous stream of Western air defence interceptors, Ukraine is increasingly exposed to intensified Russian bombardments. Higher casualties are likely, including among civilians, as cities lose their protection.

Looking further ahead, a victory for Republican frontrunner Donald Trump in the U.S.' November 2024 polls could lead to a distancing between Washington and its long-standing NATO allies, and major cuts to any remaining U.S. aid for Ukraine.

What should be done? Ukraine needs more well-trained, well-armed troops to stave off Russia's increasingly overwhelming firepower. To do this, Kyiv's Western backers on both sides of the Atlantic must deliver on pledges of support by ramping up arms production. Kyiv, meanwhile, urgently needs to reform its broken recruitment system. Specifically, it should mobilise and train fresh troops to allow rotation of forces on the frontlines, some of whom have been there since the full-scale invasion, collaborate with partners on improving training for existing and incoming recruits, and tackle corruption.

Finally, Kyiv and its backers need a more realistic and joined-up strategy to make longer-term military aid predictable. Without it, Ukraine's chances of withstanding Russia's attritional war could begin to fade rapidly.