

A world at peace and war

PEACE, they say, was busting out all over in 1988. Well, look closer. A cheering number of the world's wars moved towards their end this year; but man's slaughter of man continues in a grim tally of other places. The star of peace gleams fitfully.

Russian soldiers are walking out of Afghanistan, their Cuban allies have promised to quit Angola. The South Africans say they will leave Namibia, and have offered aid to the Mozambique they had been thumping. America's Congress refused any more support to the Nicaraguan contras, so that war is fizzling out. Libya's Colonel Qaddafi shook hands with Chad. Iran has agreed to a ceasefire in the Gulf war and may be less eager to support fundamentalist mayhem.

Retreating foreign armies do not necessarily leave peace behind: ask the Afghans and the Angolans. But there are surer ways of getting peace. Our map shows that foreign pull-outs have been outnumbered by a combination of peace treaties (which formally end wars), ceasefires (which stop the actual fighting) and fizzle-outs (where sheer exhaustion ends the bloodshed); and that three hopeful peacemakings are still in progress. Out

of 26 bloodlettings that meet our definition of wars, 12 have stopped, or stand a good chance of stopping.

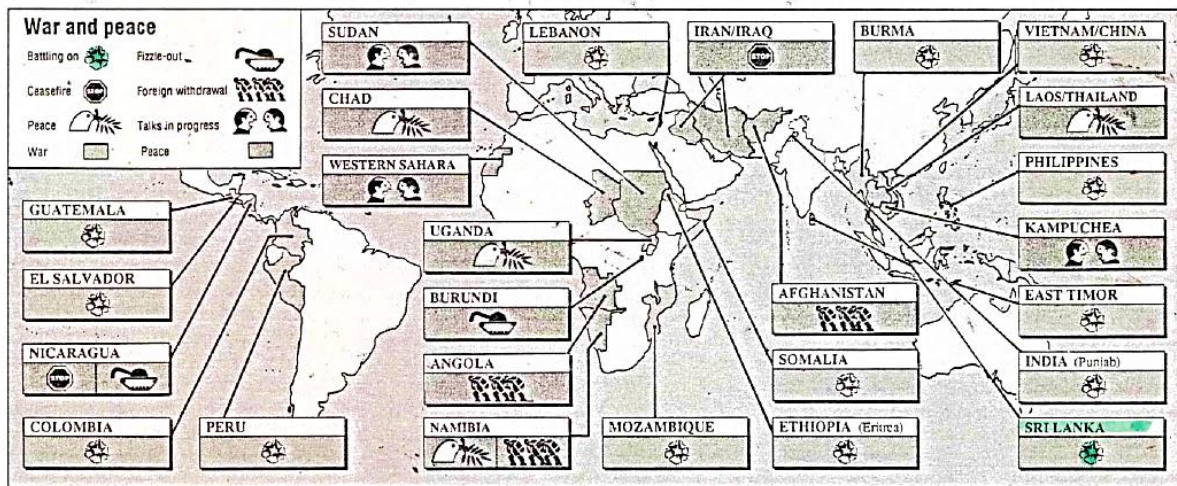
As wars, we have counted only current conflicts in which more than 1,000 people have died in at least one year. (By itself, the Namibian war probably never killed that many, but we include it because it is linked to the bigger Angolan war.) The map therefore leaves out the relatively modest bloodshed in South Africa and Northern Ireland, as well as the subject of 1988's most recent peaceward stride, the recognition of Israel by the Palestinians' Mr Yasser Arafat: in recent years Israeli-Palestinian killings have never reached the 1,000 mark, though past, wider, Arab-Israeli wars often have.

Some of the bloodiest wars since 1945—France versus Algeria, India against Pakistan, the early part of the Vietnam war—have been fought to build new nations out of Europe's retreating empires. This year has brought the end of one such war, in Namibia (once a German colony), and has started to unravel another two, in Angola (Portuguese) and the Western Sahara (Spanish). As the consequences of European empire have faded, Africa and parts of Asia have become

safer places. If Russia's empire starts to crumble, Eastern Europe and Soviet Asia may become more dangerous ones.

The hardest conflicts to end are those where tribes or ideologies want a bit of land controlled by a different set of people or ideas. Burma has both sorts of civil war, which will probably get worse next year if 1988's protesting students are trained to handle guns by the long-rebellious tribesmen around the country's periphery. The tribal wars in Lebanon, Ethiopia and Punjab roar on.

Attempts at peacemaking sometimes make things worse. The arrival of the Indian army brought Sri Lanka's Tamil rebels partly under control, at the cost of creating a Sinhalese counter-rebellion against the government which had brought the Indians in, Somalia's government thought it had taken the sting out of its guerrilla enemies by making peace with their Ethiopian patrons in April; instead, the deal worried the rebels enough to make them redouble their attacks, and some (probably too gloomy) reports say 50,000 people died between June and August. In El Salvador the half-hearted ceasefires that followed the signing of the Arias peace plan in August 1987 have given way to the goriest fighting since the early 1980s. The reign of peace has not yet quite come.



the end of December will merely be monitoring ship movements. The Americans operate in the whole of the Gulf; the Europeans stay in the south.

The British have nine warships in the Gulf; they no longer accompany shipping. The French still have seven ships in the region. Belgium has withdrawn its three ships. The remaining Italian and Dutch warships will leave during December.

The waters are unlikely to prove wholly

clean. Iran mined stretches of the Gulf during the war, to hit ships heading for the Arab countries that supported Iraq. The Iraqis are thought to have mined their own waters in self-defence. Dozens, perhaps hundreds, of mines are probably still there. Iran seems to have used some (illegal) floating mines; even moored mines may break loose in storms and float into swept areas.

The Kuwaitis, at the northern end of the Gulf, worry most. In late October they

summoned an emergency meeting of the Regional Organisation for the Protection of the Marine Environment, a group set up in 1982 to tackle oil spills; the Kuwaitis wanted a joint survey of hazards to shipping. Iraq attended, and so did Iran, though at a junior level. If the Gulf states can tackle this threat together, they might start to co-operate over security. Meanwhile, sailors had better keep their eyes peeled.