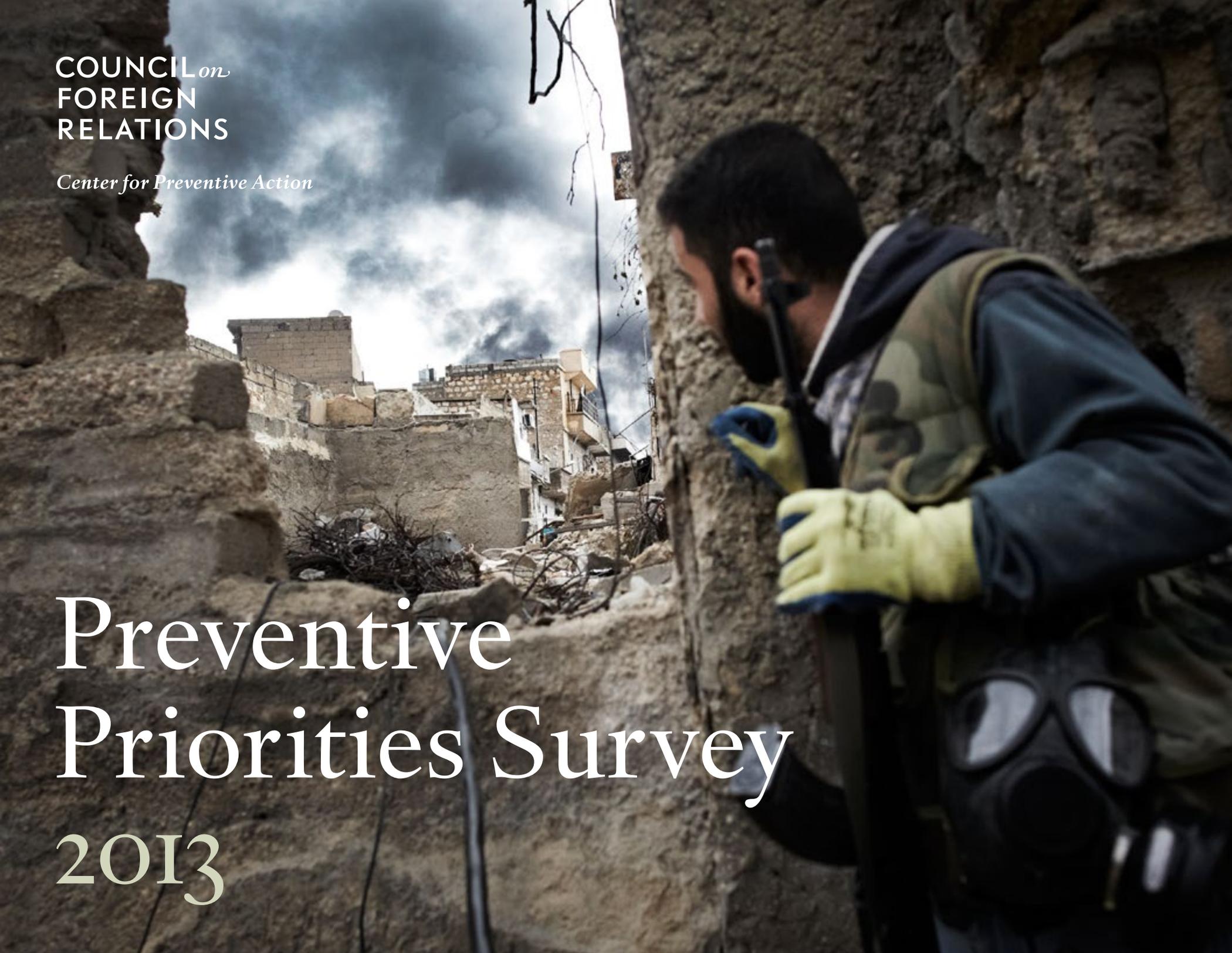


COUNCIL *on*
FOREIGN
RELATIONS

Center for Preventive Action

A man in military attire, including a dark jacket with camouflage patches and yellow gloves, is looking through a narrow opening in a stone wall. The background shows a town with damaged buildings and a cloudy sky. The man is holding a rifle, and his expression is serious.

Preventive Priorities Survey 2013

The Council on Foreign Relations acknowledges Carnegie Corporation for its generous support of the Preventive Priorities Survey.

Copyright © 2012 by the Council on Foreign Relations®, Inc. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America.

This publication may not be reproduced in whole or in part, in any form beyond the reproduction permitted by Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law Act (17 U.S.C. Sections 107 and 108) and excerpts by reviewers for the public press, without express written permission from the Council on Foreign Relations.

COUNCIL *on*
FOREIGN
RELATIONS

Center for Preventive Action

Paul B. Stares

Director, Center for Preventive Action

Andrew C. Miller

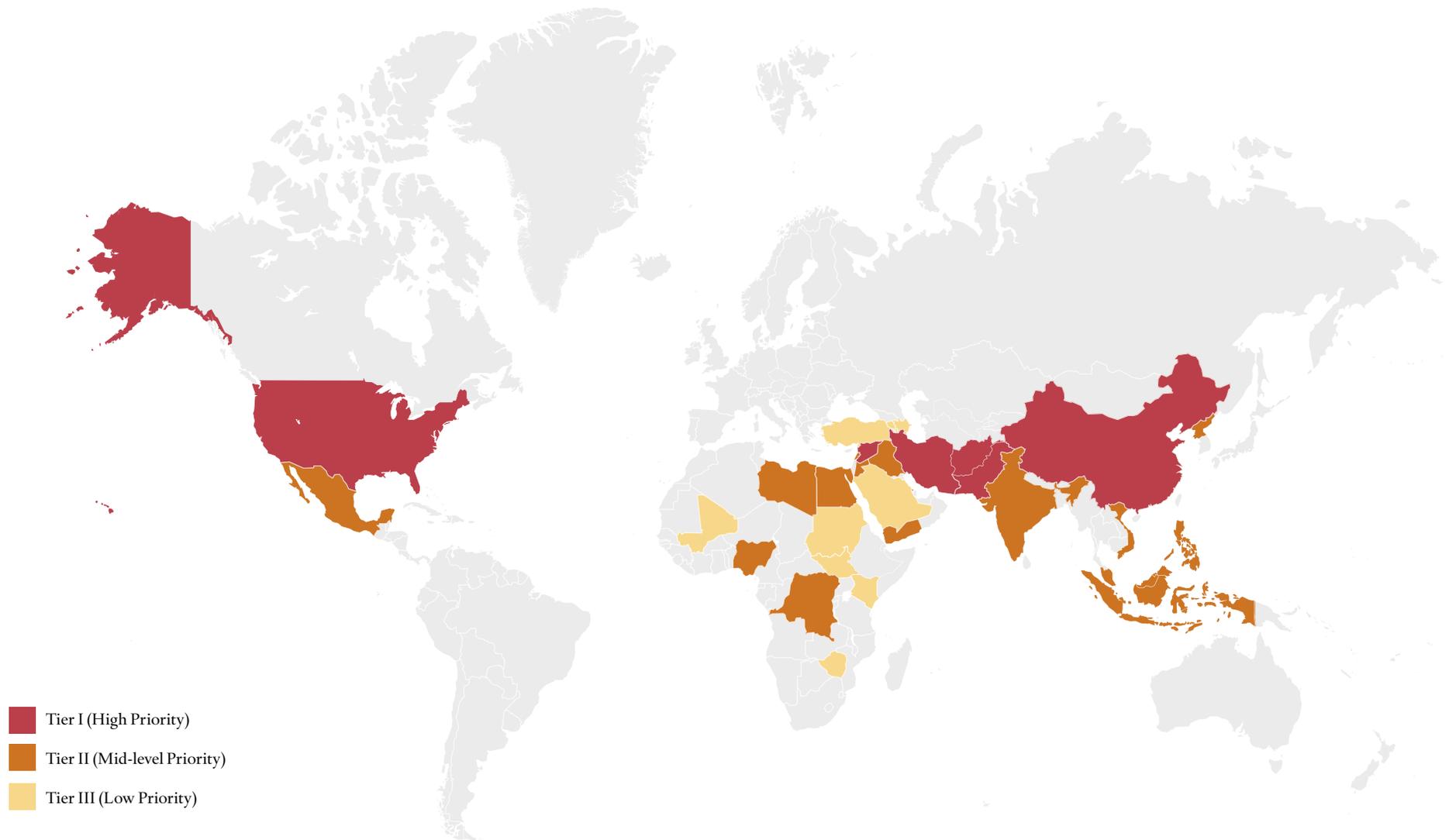
Research Associate, Center for Preventive Action

Preventive Priorities Survey 2013

The Center for Preventive Action's annual Preventive Priorities Survey (PPS) evaluates ongoing and potential violent conflicts based on the impact they could have on U.S. interests and their likelihood of occurring in the coming year. Policymakers have limited time and resources for preventive action and thus have to focus on a select number of potentially harmful contingencies from a myriad of possibilities. The PPS polls experts in the field and aims to help the U.S. policy community prioritize these competing conflict prevention and mitigation demands.



View the interactive 2013 Preventive Priorities Survey online at cfr.org/preventive_priorities_survey



About the PPS Process



Preventing the outbreak of violent conflict in the world and mitigating its harmful consequences when it does have long been primary goals of U.S. foreign and security policy. Some potential sources of conflict appear more likely than others and understandably grab attention because of that. The same also applies to the potential escalation of ongoing conflicts. Yet they cannot all be considered equally consequential—both in terms of their overall cost and, moreover, their harmful impact on U.S. interests. Given finite resources and competing demands at home, U.S. policymakers must

make choices about where to devote their attention. In short, they have to prioritize their conflict prevention and mitigation objectives in ways that rationally balance the competing imperatives of urgency and importance.

The Preventive Priorities Survey seeks to help policymakers choose among these competing demands by offering what is essentially an assessment of future risk based on expert opinion. *Risk* in this context is defined as the product of the perceived likelihood of a conflict erupting or escalating and the perceived impact it would likely have on U.S.

interests according to defined criteria. The PPS, therefore, is not a predictive exercise or tool. Prediction, not least of violent instability and conflict with all its many complexities, is beyond anyone's power. Unpredictable, however, is not the same as unforeseeable. Estimates of the relative likelihood of a conflict erupting or escalating can be made on the basis of identifying the presence and interaction of known risk factors and projecting how they could plausibly evolve in unwelcome ways.

Neither is the PPS a prescriptive exercise or tool. Estimating the potential impact of a conflict on U.S. interests requires not only assessing possible costs (and, to be fair, opportunities), which is hard to do given the uncertain trajectory of events, but also making judgments about what constitutes the “national interest.” For all the regularity in which the national interest is invoked in public debates, there are no clear or generally accepted criteria for assessing the relative importance of different interests or values that fall under this term. The criteria used here are thus subjective. Conflicts that could directly harm the lives or livelihoods of Americans rank higher than conflicts that would not. The same also applies to countries already identified as in the U.S. interest to protect—especially those where sizable contingents of U.S. forces are deployed and potentially in harm's way—versus others that are not classified as allies or considered to be strategically important for some reason.

Finally, the PPS represents a snapshot of expert opinion at the time the survey was conducted in November 2012. The world is a dynamic place and assessments of risk change accordingly—at least they should. The results, therefore, could be quite different several months hence.

Methodology

The Center for Preventive Action (CPA) carried out the 2013 PPS in three stages:

1. *Solicited suggestions from experts and the broader public to develop a list of thirty contingencies for the survey.* CPA's in-house experts, in consultation with forecasting specialists and Council on Foreign Relations fellows, identified contingencies to include on the survey that met two broad criteria: plausibility of occurring in 2013 and potential to harm U.S. interests. For the first time, CPA also asked the broader public to proffer suggestions on social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Quora, and others). Casting a wide net helped identify potential outbreaks of violence that may not have received due attention from the media and expert community. From the hundreds of suggestions received, CPA narrowed the list to thirty contingencies of sufficient clarity and plausibility to warrant inclusion on the survey.
2. *Surveyed a wide cross-section of foreign policy experts to assess the potential impact and likelihood of each contingency.* The survey was sent to more than fifteen hundred government officials, academics, and forecasting experts. Whereas in previous PPS iterations, respondents ranked the thirty contingencies solely based on their potential impact, this year's survey also asked the respondents to assess the contingencies' likelihood of occurring in 2013. They were also invited to identify contingencies that did not appear on the survey but that they felt policymakers should consider nonetheless.
3. *Assigned each contingency to one of three tiers based on its potential impact and likelihood.* The survey results informed CPA's placement of the contingencies into their tier rankings, with those appearing in Tier I judged the highest preventive priorities for U.S. policymakers. Tier II contingencies have a combined impact and likelihood ranking below Tier I and are thus deemed mid-level priorities. Low-priority contingencies fall in Tier III, according to the PPS rubric. Despite their placement in the lowest tier, policymakers should not ignore these threats altogether, as they could still have meaningful consequences—humanitarian or otherwise.



Threat Matrix

		IMPACT ON U.S. INTERESTS		
		High	Moderate	Low
LIKELIHOOD	Likely	Tier I	Tier I	Tier II
	Plausible	Tier I	Tier II	Tier III
	Unlikely	Tier II	Tier III	Tier III

■ Tier I
 ■ Tier II
 ■ Tier III

Definitions

IMPACT ON U.S. INTERESTS

- High: contingency directly threatens the U.S. homeland, is likely to trigger U.S. military involvement because of treaty commitments, or threatens the supplies of critical U.S. strategic resources
- Moderate: contingency affects countries of strategic importance to the United States but do not involve a mutual-defense treaty commitment
- Low: contingency could have severe/widespread humanitarian consequences but in countries of limited strategic importance to the United States

LIKELIHOOD

- Likely: contingency will likely occur in 2013
- Plausible: contingency will plausibly occur in 2013
- Unlikely: contingency is unlikely to occur in 2013

2013 Findings



There are some notable differences between the 2013 and 2012 PPS results. Last year, an outbreak of widespread civil violence in Syria was judged a Tier II (i.e., mid-level) preventive priority for the United States. This year, the intensification of Syria's civil war, including possible limited intervention, is considered not only a "high impact" threat but also "likely" to occur, making it not only a Tier I contingency but also the highest-ranked priority on the survey. The possibility of nonstate actors—militia groups or terrorist organizations—acquiring biological or chemical weapons from Syria's stockpiles also emerged this year as a Tier I concern, reflecting recent media reports and official U.S. warnings.

Many of last year's Tier I contingencies remained high preventive priorities. These include the possibility of a military incident involving the United States or one of its allies and China over various territorial disputes in East Asia, a mass casualty terrorist attack on the U.S. homeland or treaty ally, a highly disruptive cyberattack, intensification of the Iranian nuclear crisis, and severe instability in Pakistan. All were judged to be "plausible" contingencies with the potential of having a "high impact." With coalition forces drawing down in Afghanistan, a major erosion of security in the country was also placed in Tier I since it was seen as having a "moderate impact" and "likely" to occur.

Not all Tier I contingencies from last year's PPS remained in place, however. The possibility of a significant increase in drug-related conflict in Mexico dropped to Tier II, most likely in response to promising reports of abating violence there. Pyongyang's recent missile launch notwithstanding, a severe North Korean crisis now also has a Tier II ranking. At the same time, potential instability in Saudi Arabia had a Tier I ranking on the 2012 PPS in the wake of the Arab Awakening turmoil but has fallen to Tier III this year. This can be attributed to the absence of significant popular unrest in Saudi Arabia and a perceived diminishing U.S. dependence on Persian Gulf energy supplies.

Many of last year's Tier II contingencies stayed in place—notably those relating to Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, India, Pakistan, Iraq, and countries with competing claims to the South China Sea. The possibility of Lebanon being destabilized by the conflict in neighboring Syria not surprisingly emerged as a new concern. Jordan is also now considered more vulnerable to popular political unrest. Meanwhile, three African contingencies were elevated

from Tier III to Tier II priorities: increased political instability in Nigeria, deepening violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the potential emergence of Libya as a terrorist safe haven.

Many of the Tier III contingencies this year are familiar from the 2012 survey. These include continuing friction between Sudan and South Sudan, military clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the possibility of violence around the 2013 presidential election in Kenya, and unrest in Zimbabwe, also related to planned elections or the possible death of Robert Mugabe. The potential for Mali to further deteriorate as a result of a failed intervention, growing instability in Sudan, and renewed unrest in the Kurdish-dominated regions of Turkey and the Middle East emerged as new Tier III concerns.

Since the survey was limited to thirty contingencies, respondents had the opportunity to add other potential crises that they thought warranted attention. Those worthy of mention include the outbreak of a third Palestinian intifada, widespread popular unrest in China, escalation of a U.S.-Iran naval clash in the Persian Gulf, a Sino-Indian border crisis, onset of elections-related instability and violence in Ethiopia, unrest in Cuba following the death of Fidel Castro and/or incapacitation of Raul Castro, and widespread political unrest in Venezuela triggered by the death or incapacitation of Hugo Chavez.

■ Tier I

Contingencies judged high preventive priorities for U.S. policymakers

*IMPACT: HIGH
LIKELIHOOD: LIKELY*

- intensification of **Syria's** civil war, including possible limited external intervention

*IMPACT: HIGH
LIKELIHOOD: PLAUSIBLE*

- an Iranian nuclear crisis such as a surprise advance in **Iran's** nuclear weapons/delivery capability followed by an Israeli response
- a major military incident with **China** involving U.S. or allied forces such as a Sino-Japanese clash over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands
- a mass casualty attack on the U.S. **homeland** or on a treaty ally
- nonstate actors acquire biological or chemical weapons from stockpiles in **Syria**
- severe internal instability in **Pakistan**, triggered by a civil-military crisis or terror attacks
- a highly disruptive cyberattack on U.S. critical infrastructure

*IMPACT: MODERATE
LIKELIHOOD: LIKELY*

- a major erosion of security in **Afghanistan** resulting from coalition drawdown



Tier II

Contingencies judged mid-level preventive priorities for U.S. policymakers

*IMPACT: MODERATE
LIKELIHOOD: PLAUSIBLE*

- a severe **Indo-Pakistan** crisis that carries risk of military escalation, triggered by a major terror attack
- a severe **North Korean** crisis caused by another military provocation, internal political instability, or threatening nuclear weapons/ICBM-related activities
- a significant increase in drug trafficking violence in **Mexico** that spills over into the United States
- a **South China Sea** armed confrontation over competing territorial claims
- continuing political instability and emergence of a terrorist safe haven in **Libya**
- further deterioration of security and/or backlash against counterterrorism operations expands al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula safe haven in **Yemen**
- growing instability in **Bahrain** that spurs violent government reprisals or further Saudi and/or Iranian military action
- increasing sectarian violence and heightened political instability in **Nigeria**
- renewed sectarian violence in **Lebanon** due to spillover from the conflict in Syria
- rising sectarian violence and growing secessionist pressures in **Iraq**
- widespread popular protests in **Jordan** triggered by dissatisfaction with the pace of political reform
- unrest in **Egypt** over pace of reforms and deteriorating economic conditions



*IMPACT: HIGH
LIKELIHOOD: UNLIKELY*

- a U.S.-**Pakistan** military confrontation, triggered by a terror attack or U.S. counterterror operations

*IMPACT: LOW
LIKELIHOOD: LIKELY*

- a deepening of violence in the eastern **Democratic Republic of the Congo** that involves military intervention from its neighbors

■ Tier III

Contingencies judged low preventive priorities for U.S. policymakers

*IMPACT: LOW
LIKELIHOOD: PLAUSIBLE*

- growing popular unrest and political instability in **Sudan**
- military conflict between **Sudan** and **South Sudan**
- renewed ethnic violence in **Kenya** surrounding March 2013 presidential election
- widespread unrest in **Zimbabwe** surrounding the electoral process and/or the death of Robert Mugabe

*IMPACT: MODERATE
LIKELIHOOD: UNLIKELY*

- political instability in **Saudi Arabia** that endangers global oil supplies
- renewed unrest in the Kurdish-dominated regions of **Turkey** and the Middle East

*IMPACT: LOW
LIKELIHOOD: UNLIKELY*

- an outbreak of military conflict between **Armenia** and **Azerbaijan**, possibly over Nagorno-Karabakh
- failure of a multilateral intervention to push out Islamist groups from **Mali's** north



ABOUT THE CENTER FOR PREVENTIVE ACTION

The Center for Preventive Action (CPA) seeks to help prevent, defuse, or resolve deadly conflicts around the world and to expand the body of knowledge on conflict prevention. It does so by creating a forum in which representatives of governments, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, corporations, and civil society can gather to develop operational and timely strategies for promoting peace in specific conflict situations. The center focuses on conflicts in countries or regions that affect U.S. interests, but may be otherwise overlooked; where prevention appears possible; and when the resources of the Council on Foreign Relations can make a difference. The center does this by

- Issuing Council Special Reports to evaluate and respond rapidly to developing conflict situations and formulate timely, concrete policy recommendations that the U.S. government, international community, and local actors can use to limit the potential for deadly violence.
- Engaging the U.S. government and news media in conflict prevention efforts. CPA staff members meet with administration officials and members of Congress to brief on CPA's findings and recommendations; facilitate contacts between U.S. officials and important local and external actors; and raise awareness among journalists of potential flashpoints around the globe.
- Building networks with international organizations and institutions to complement and leverage the Council's established influence in the U.S. policy arena and increase the impact of CPA's recommendations.
- Providing a source of expertise on conflict prevention to include research, case studies, and lessons learned from past conflicts that policymakers and private citizens can use to prevent or mitigate future deadly conflicts.

For more information, to sign up for the CPA newsletter, or to access the Center for Preventive Action's latest work, please visit www.cfr.org/cpa. CPA is on Facebook: www.facebook.com/CFRCenterForPreventiveAction.

ABOUT THE COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

The Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) is an independent, nonpartisan membership organization, think tank, and publisher dedicated to being a resource for its members, government officials, business executives, journalists, educators and students, civic and religious leaders, and other interested citizens in order to help them better understand the world and the foreign policy choices facing the United States and other countries.

The Council on Foreign Relations takes no institutional positions on policy issues and has no affiliation with the U.S. government. All statements of fact and expressions of opinion contained in its publications and on its website are the sole responsibility of the author or authors.

For further information about CFR or this publication, please write to the Council on Foreign Relations, 58 East 68th Street, New York, NY 10065, or call Communications at 212.434.9888. Visit CFR's website, CFR.org.

Cover photo: During the Eid al-Adha Muslim holiday, a member of the Free Syrian Army observes the damage caused by an enemy tank around Saknt Hanano, a regime military base and the center of the latest fighting in Aleppo, Syria, on October 26, 2012 (Sebastiano Tomada/Sipa USA/AP images).

Council on Foreign Relations

58 East 68th Street
New York, NY 10065
tel 212.434.9400
fax 212.434.9800

1777 F Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006
tel 202.509.8400
fax 202.509.8490

www.cfr.org