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# Redefining 'Conflicted Areas' in the Age of Remote Warfare: The 2025–2026 Iran War as a Test Case

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**Abstract**

The concept of "conflicted areas" (or conflict-affected areas) has traditionally been defined by the physical presence of armed violence within identifiable geographic boundaries. However, the rapid proliferation of remote warfare technologies, including precision-guided missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles, cyber weapons, and proxy networks, has fundamentally altered the spatial logic of armed conflict. This article examines how the 2025–2026 Iran war challenges established understandings of what constitutes a conflicted area. It argues that when belligerents can project lethal force across thousands of kilometers, striking military installations, civilian infrastructure, and population centers in states that are not formal parties to a conflict, the traditional territorial framing of conflicted areas becomes inadequate. Drawing on international humanitarian law scholarship, remote warfare literature, and empirical evidence from the ongoing conflict, this article proposes a reconceptualization of conflicted areas that accounts for the deterritorialized, networked, and multi-domain character of contemporary warfare.

**Keywords:** conflicted areas, remote warfare, Iran war, international humanitarian law, drones, cyber warfare, proxy warfare, Strait of Hormuz

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## 1. Introduction

The term "conflicted areas" (often rendered as "conflict-affected areas" or "conflict zones" in policy and legal documents) has served as a cornerstone concept in international humanitarian law (IHL), development policy, and security studies. According to the OECD Due Diligence Guidance, conflict-affected areas are identified by the presence of armed conflict, widespread violence, or other risks of harm to people, and may encompass a region, a country, an area within a country, or an area that crosses one or more national boundaries (OECD, 2016). Similarly, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) classifies armed conflicts on the basis of factual and legal criteria, distinguishing between international armed conflicts (IACs) and non-international armed conflicts (NIACs), noting that the number of armed conflicts has steadily risen since the 1990s, with the number of NIACs tripling since 2000 (ICRC, 2024). The Geneva Academy's Rule of Law in Armed Conflicts (RULAC) project monitors over 110 armed conflicts globally, providing legal classification and tracking of the parties, developments, and applicable international law in each (Geneva Academy, n.d.).

These frameworks, however, were designed for an era in which the geography of conflict was

relatively legible: combatants met on battlefields, occupied territories, or fought across recognized frontlines. The rise of remote warfare, broadly understood as an approach used by states to counter threats at a distance while minimizing the deployment of conventional ground forces (Biegon et al., 2021; Krieg & Rickli, 2018), has complicated this picture beyond recognition. When drone swarms launched from one continent can devastate infrastructure in another, when cyber operations can paralyze financial systems and communications networks without crossing a physical border, and when ballistic missiles can strike civilian population centers in states that are formally neutral, the question of where a conflict is taking place becomes far more difficult to answer.

This article examines the meaning and scope of "conflicted areas" in the era of remote warfare, using the 2025–2026 Iran war as a primary case study. The conflict between the United States and Israel, on one side, and Iran and its network of allied non-state actors, on the other, provides a compelling test case for several reasons. First, the war has been characterized by extensive use of remote warfare capabilities, from precision-guided munitions and stealth aircraft to unmanned aerial vehicles, ballistic missiles, and cyber operations. Second, the conflict has spread far beyond the territory of the primary belligerents, directly affecting at least nine additional countries across the Middle East and beyond. Third, the war has generated catastrophic consequences for civilian populations, global trade, and energy security in areas that were never intended to be battlefields. These features make the Iran war an ideal lens through which to interrogate whether existing definitions of conflicted areas remain fit for purpose.

The article proceeds as follows. The first section reviews the conceptual foundations of "conflicted areas" in international law and policy. The second section examines the concept of remote warfare and its implications for the spatial logic of conflict. The third section presents the 2025–2026 Iran war as a case study, tracing the geographic and technological dimensions of the conflict. The fourth section analyzes how the case challenges existing frameworks, and the final section offers a reconceptualization of conflicted areas suited to the realities of twenty-first-century warfare.

## 2. Conceptual Foundations: Defining Conflicted Areas

The concept of conflict-affected areas operates at the intersection of international humanitarian law, human rights discourse, and development policy. Its definitional evolution reflects the changing character of armed conflict itself.

### 2.1. The IHL Framework

International humanitarian law provides the foundational legal categories for classifying armed conflict. IHL distinguishes between international armed conflicts, which occur when one or more states use armed force against another state, and non-international armed conflicts, involving protracted armed violence between governmental forces and organized armed groups, or between such groups (ICRC, 2024). The legal classification determines the applicable body of law: the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols provide the primary regulatory framework (ICRC, 2004). Crucially, the existence of an armed conflict, and by extension the designation of an area as conflict-affected, is determined by factual conditions on the ground rather than by formal declarations of war (Vité, 2009).

This factual approach was affirmed by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in the landmark Tadić case, where the tribunal ruled that an armed conflict exists whenever there is resort to armed force between states or protracted armed violence between governmental authorities and organized armed groups (ICTY, 1995). The ICRC's

2024 Opinion Paper on the classification of armed conflicts further noted that contemporary transformations in how armed actors participate in conflict, including coalition operations, proxy arrangements, and the splintering of armed groups, have made classification increasingly complex (ICRC, 2024).

### 2.2. Policy and Regulatory Definitions

Beyond IHL, several policy frameworks have operationalized the concept of conflict-affected areas for specific regulatory purposes. The OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains defines conflict-affected and high-risk areas as those identified by the presence of armed conflict, widespread violence or other risks of harm to people, noting that armed conflict may take a variety of forms, such as a conflict of international or non-international character (OECD, 2016). The European Union Conflict Minerals Regulation adopted a similar definition, encompassing areas in a state of armed conflict, fragile post-conflict areas, and areas witnessing weak or non-existing governance and widespread violations of international law (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2017). The UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights clarified in its 2020 report that the concept extends to situations of widespread violence beyond formally declared armed conflicts (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2020). In the investment domain, conflict-affected areas are identified through the Geneva Academy's RULAC platform using IHL standards, combined with global indices measuring geopolitical conflict, repression, and fragility (Heartland Initiative, 2025).

A common thread across these definitions is their fundamentally territorial orientation. Conflict-affected areas are conceived as geographic spaces, whether countries, sub-national regions, or cross-border zones, in which violence is physically present. This spatial logic made intuitive sense when the primary mode of warfare involved the physical deployment of armed forces into a contested territory. As the next section explores, the advent of remote warfare has strained this territorial paradigm to its limits.

## 3. Remote Warfare and the Transformation of Conflict's Spatial Logic

Remote warfare has emerged as a central concept in contemporary security studies, though it remains a contested and evolving term. At its core, remote warfare describes an approach in which states seek to project military power and counter threats while maintaining physical distance from the frontlines of fighting (Biegon et al., 2021). Ohlin (2017) has offered perhaps the most influential definition, characterizing remoteness as allowing operators to use discriminating force while receding further in time and space from the target of military operations. Rauta (2021) has subjected the concept to rigorous conceptual critique, arguing that while remote warfare is far from a robust concept, its proliferation across academic, policy, and practitioner communities reflects genuine empirical realities that demand analytical attention.

### 3.1. Key Dimensions of Remoteness

The literature has identified several dimensions along which conflict can become "remote." The most obvious is physical distance: drone operators based thousands of kilometers from a conflict zone can execute lethal strikes with no physical presence in the theater of operations (Boyle, 2015). Krieg and Rickli (2018) argued that in contemporary surrogate warfare, the organization of violence has shifted from the state's soldier as the primary bearer of the burden of warfare to a mode where technological and human surrogates enable the state to manage the risks of conflict remotely. This externalization encompasses not only drone warfare but also the use of private military companies, proxy forces, cyber weapons, and autonomous systems.

A second dimension is political remoteness. States engaged in remote warfare can distance their domestic publics from the costs and consequences of conflict, reducing political accountability (Demmers & Gould, 2021). As Chamayou (2015) argued, drone warfare creates a situation in which one side bears virtually no physical risk, fundamentally altering the political calculus of going to war. A third dimension involves what might be called operational remoteness: the capacity to generate military effects in locations far removed from one's own territory, supply lines, or traditional zones of engagement. Precision-guided munitions, ballistic missiles, and cyber capabilities all enable this form of remote force projection.

### 3.2. Implications for the Geography of Conflict

The expansion of remote warfare capabilities has profound implications for how conflict zones are conceptualized. When military effects can be generated at intercontinental distances, the traditional distinction between the zone of armed conflict and areas of peace becomes blurred. Boyle (2015) noted that one of the most significant challenges posed by drone-based targeted killing was the engagement of non-state actors operating outside recognized conflict zones, effectively expanding the geography of the battlefield. Gusterson (2016) argued that remote killing tends to turn the whole world into a conflict zone and involves a problematic prioritization of troop protection above civilian protection.

The proliferation of cheap drone technologies has intensified this dynamic. As Calcara et al. (2022) observed, the emergence of low-cost, commercially derived drones in conflicts from Ukraine to Yemen has democratized the capacity for remote strikes. Barrie and others at the International Institute for Strategic Studies noted that drones, particularly in their "second age" characterized by the global proliferation of military and commercial drone technology, have enabled both state and non-state actors to compete for control of the skies (Watling & Reynolds, 2023). The implications for the geographic scope of conflict are significant: when even relatively poor non-state actors can launch drone attacks across hundreds of kilometers, the zone of potential military engagement expands dramatically.

Cyber warfare adds yet another layer of spatial complexity. Unlike kinetic operations, cyber attacks are not bound by physical geography at all. As Schmitt (2017) argued in the Tallinn Manual, the application of international law to cyberspace raises fundamental questions about territoriality, sovereignty, and the threshold of armed conflict. A cyber operation launched from one state can paralyze critical infrastructure in another without any physical projectile crossing a border, yet the humanitarian consequences, including disruption of hospitals, water systems, and electrical grids, may be indistinguishable from those caused by conventional bombardment.

## 4. The 2025–2026 Iran War: A Case Study in the Deterritorialization of Conflict

The conflict between Iran and the United States and Israel that began in earnest with the Twelve-Day War of June 2025 and escalated dramatically with the joint US-Israeli strikes of February 28, 2026, provides a vivid illustration of how remote warfare technologies can radically expand the geography of armed conflict. This section traces the key dimensions of the conflict relevant to the reconceptualization of conflicted areas.

### 4.1. Origins and Escalation

The immediate origins of the 2025–2026 Iran war lie in the broader Middle Eastern crisis that intensified following Hamas's October 7, 2023 attacks on Israel. Throughout 2024, Israel significantly diminished the capabilities of Iran's regional allies, including Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza, and other members of Iran's so-called Axis of Resistance (Encyclopaedia

Britannica, 2026). Direct exchanges of fire between Israel and Iran in April and October 2024, followed by the Twelve-Day War in June 2025, represented a dramatic shift from decades of proxy conflict to open interstate confrontation (Wikipedia, 2025). During this twelve-day conflict, Israel struck Iranian military and nuclear facilities while the US bombed three Iranian nuclear sites; Iran retaliated with over 550 ballistic missiles and more than 1,000 drones targeting both military and civilian sites in Israel (Wikipedia, 2025).

Following a ceasefire in June 2025, the situation continued to deteriorate. Iran's economy spiraled under sanctions and the costs of war, leading to massive protests beginning in December 2025. Security forces responded with a brutal crackdown that killed thousands of civilians (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2026). On February 28, 2026, the United States and Israel launched Operation Epic Fury, a coordinated strike campaign targeting Iranian military infrastructure, nuclear sites, and leadership, resulting in the assassination of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei (Hamdach, 2026). Iran retaliated with missile and drone strikes against Israel, US military bases across the Middle East, and multiple countries hosting US forces (Al Jazeera, 2026b).

### 4.2. The Multi-Front, Multi-Domain Character of the Conflict

The most striking feature of the 2026 Iran war, from the perspective of conflicted areas analysis, is the sheer geographic extent of military operations. Iran launched retaliatory strikes across at least nine countries: Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and, via a drone, the United Kingdom's Akrotiri military base on Cyprus (Al Jazeera, 2026b). For the first time in history, Iran attacked all six Gulf Cooperation Council member states simultaneously (ACLED, 2026). The Gulf states, which had sought for decades to insulate themselves from direct Iranian military action, found themselves on the frontlines of a conflict they had neither initiated nor desired (Arab Center Washington DC, 2026).

The scale of these operations is notable. According to data compiled by the UAE Ministry of Defence, as of early April 2026, Iran had fired a total of 438 ballistic missiles, 2,012 drones, and 19 cruise missiles at targets in the UAE alone (Wikipedia, 2026b). Although most were intercepted, debris and projectiles fell on civilian areas in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, causing damage to infrastructure and civilian casualties (Wikipedia, 2026b). Across the Gulf region, Iranian strikes killed civilians in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, including nationals of Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, India, Egypt, and Morocco (Al Jazeera, 2026b).

Simultaneously, Israel expanded its military operations into Lebanon, launching what became the 2026 Lebanon war against Hezbollah, which had resumed rocket attacks on Israeli territory (Wikipedia, 2026a). Yemen's Houthi rebels, allied with Iran, attacked Israel with ballistic missiles on March 28 and threatened to close the Bab el-Mandeb Strait (Al Jazeera, 2026b). The closure of the Strait of Hormuz by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps constituted another dimension of the conflict's geographic expansion, transforming one of the world's most critical maritime chokepoints into an active theater of operations (Wikipedia, 2026c).

The cyber domain constituted yet another front. According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Operation Epic Fury included coordinated cyber and space effects that disrupted Iranian communications and sensor networks, while Iran experienced a near-total internet blackout running at only 4 percent of normal connectivity levels (CSIS, 2026). Iranian-linked cyber actors and their proxies conducted operations targeting fuel distribution systems in Jordan and disrupted GPS and automatic identification systems affecting more than 1,100 ships across the Gulf region (CSIS, 2026). Israel also conducted cyberattacks on Iranian infrastructure, media, and phone applications with messages inciting civilian unrest (Wikipedia, 2026e).

### 4.3. Civilian and Humanitarian Consequences Beyond the Primary Theater

The humanitarian consequences of the conflict's geographic spread have been severe. Iranian strikes on civilian infrastructure in the Gulf included attacks on energy facilities, airports, hotels, residential buildings, and luxury commercial districts (ACLED, 2026). In Iran itself, US-Israeli strikes damaged military bases, government buildings, but also schools, hospitals, heritage sites, bridges, ports, railway networks, universities, power plants, and water desalination facilities (Al Jazeera, 2026a). By early March 2026, some 4,000 civilian buildings in Iran had been damaged (Wikipedia, 2026d).

The economic reverberations extended globally. The disruption of oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz, through which approximately 25 percent of the world's seaborne oil trade and 20 percent of its liquefied natural gas normally passed, triggered fuel shortages and rationing across Asia (Wikipedia, 2026c). The head of the International Energy Agency described the resulting situation as the greatest global energy security challenge in history (Wikipedia, 2026d). In the Gulf states, the conflict triggered a large-scale departure of foreign residents and workers, with over 220,000 Indian nationals repatriated from the GCC region and Iran by March 2026 (Wikipedia, 2026d).

## 5. Analysis: How the Iran War Challenges Existing Frameworks

The empirical evidence from the 2025–2026 Iran war reveals several ways in which existing frameworks for defining conflicted areas are inadequate in the era of remote warfare.

### 5.1. The Dissolution of Territorial Boundaries

Traditional definitions of conflict-affected areas assume that the zone of armed conflict is geographically circumscribable. The OECD framework envisions a conflict-affected area as a region, a country, an area within a country, or an area that crosses one or more country boundaries (OECD, 2016). The Iran war, however, demonstrated that a conflict between two primary belligerents (Iran on one side, the US and Israel on the other) can generate lethal military effects in over a dozen countries simultaneously. The Gulf states, Cyprus, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon all experienced military strikes, yet none of them was a primary party to the conflict in its initial phases. Under existing frameworks, it is unclear whether Dubai, Doha, or Manama should be classified as conflict-affected areas. They were not theaters of armed conflict in the traditional sense, yet their civilian populations suffered casualties, their infrastructure was damaged, and their economies were disrupted by military operations.

This pattern reflects what Gusterson (2016) warned about when he argued that remote warfare tends to turn the whole world into a potential conflict zone. The physical distance between the primary belligerents and the locations where military effects are felt has expanded enormously. Ballistic missiles can traverse thousands of kilometers in minutes; drone swarms can be launched from one country and strike targets in another; and cyber operations, by their nature, are entirely unbounded by geography (Schmitt, 2017). The Iran war thus illustrates a structural transformation in the relationship between conflict and territory: the conflict zone is no longer where the soldiers are, but where the weapons reach.

### 5.2. The Challenge of Proxy and Multi-Actor Networks

The Iran war also highlights how proxy and surrogate networks extend the geography of conflict in ways that existing frameworks struggle to capture. As Krieg and Rickli (2019) argued, Iran has been one of the most extensive and effective innovators in using surrogates as a central element of its strategic posture. Hezbollah in Lebanon, Shia militias in Iraq, and the Houthis in

Yemen all constitute elements of Iran's Axis of Resistance, each capable of independent military action that can open new fronts in a conflict (Hamdach, 2026). When Hezbollah launched rockets into Israel from southern Lebanon, and when the Houthis attacked Israel with ballistic missiles from Yemen, the geographic scope of the conflict expanded instantaneously, transforming additional countries into active conflict zones.

This phenomenon is particularly challenging for existing definitions because the relationship between state sponsors and their surrogates is not always clearly delineated. Krieg and Rickli (2018) noted the intrinsic trade-off between substitution and control in surrogate warfare: states use surrogates to shift the burdens of war but necessarily sacrifice some degree of control over their surrogates' actions. In the Iran war, Iran's proxies both expanded the conflict's geography and complicated the question of which areas should be considered conflict-affected, since the involvement of these actors meant that countries far from the primary bilateral confrontation became sites of active military operations.

### 5.3. The Multi-Domain Problem

Existing definitions of conflict-affected areas are implicitly oriented toward the physical domain: they presuppose armed violence occurring in identifiable geographic spaces. The Iran war, however, demonstrated the extent to which contemporary conflict operates across multiple domains simultaneously, including air, land, sea, cyber, and space. The CSIS analysis of cyber operations during the conflict noted that Iranian-linked cyber actors disrupted fuel distribution systems in Jordan and GPS networks affecting over 1,100 ships in the Gulf, while Israeli cyber operations targeted Iranian infrastructure and communications (CSIS, 2026). These cyber effects had tangible humanitarian consequences, including the disruption of essential services and the creation of information vacuums that fueled misinformation.

The cyber dimension raises a fundamental question for the concept of conflicted areas: if a cyber attack launched from Iran disrupts fuel distribution in Jordan, or if Israeli cyber operations cause an internet blackout affecting 80 million Iranian civilians, where exactly is the conflict zone? The answer cannot be reduced to a geographic point on a map. The conflicted area, in such cases, is better understood as a networked space encompassing the nodes, connections, and infrastructure through which digital operations propagate and their effects are felt.

### 5.4. The Temporal Dimension: Permanent Vulnerability

Remote warfare capabilities also introduce a temporal dimension that existing frameworks do not adequately address. The Strait of Hormuz crisis illustrates this dynamic: Iran's threat to close the strait, combined with actual attacks on maritime shipping, transformed the entire Persian Gulf littoral into a zone of permanent vulnerability. Even during periods of ceasefire, the capability to launch ballistic missiles, deploy drone swarms, or conduct cyber operations means that areas within range of these weapons exist in a state of latent conflict. The distinction between active conflict and peace becomes a matter of degree rather than a binary classification. This echoes the ICTY's observation that international humanitarian law extends beyond the cessation of hostilities until a general conclusion of peace is reached (ICTY, 1995), but the technological dimensions of remote warfare make this extension potentially limitless in geographic scope.

## 6. Toward a Reconceptualization of Conflicted Areas

The analysis presented above suggests that a reconceptualization of conflicted areas is both necessary and urgent. The following elements should inform this reconceptualization.

First, the definition of conflicted areas should be expanded to include not only zones of direct armed violence but also areas within the effective range of belligerents' remote warfare capabilities that are subject to active targeting. The Iran war demonstrated that a country can transition from a zone of peace to an active conflict theater within minutes, when ballistic missiles or drone swarms arrive on its territory. Any revised definition should account for this potential, distinguishing perhaps between "primary conflict zones" (where sustained military operations occur), "secondary conflict zones" (where military effects are felt as a consequence of strikes, proxy operations, or retaliatory attacks), and "zones of latent conflict" (areas within the effective strike range of belligerents that have not yet been attacked but face credible risk).

Second, the concept must be expanded beyond the physical domain to encompass the cyber and information domains. The CSIS analysis of the Iran war demonstrated that cyber operations had tangible effects on civilian populations, infrastructure, and essential services, effects that are functionally equivalent to those of kinetic strikes in terms of their humanitarian consequences (CSIS, 2026). A framework that recognizes only physical violence as constitutive of a conflicted area will systematically undercount the populations and territories affected by modern warfare.

Third, the role of proxy and surrogate networks must be explicitly integrated into the framework. The current OECD definition acknowledges that conflict-affected areas can cross national boundaries (OECD, 2016), but it does not adequately capture the way in which proxy networks can instantaneously extend a conflict's geography. Krieg and Rickli (2019) concept of surrogate warfare, in which states externalize the burdens of war to human and technological substitutes, provides a useful analytical lens for understanding how the geography of conflict can be deliberately expanded through the activation of distributed non-state actor networks.

Fourth, a reconceptualized framework should adopt a dynamic rather than static approach to classification. The Iran war demonstrated that the status of a given area can change rapidly: the Gulf states transitioned from zones of relative peace to active theaters of military operations within hours of the February 28 strikes. Existing classification systems, such as the European Commission's list of conflict-affected and high-risk areas under the Conflict Minerals Regulation (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2017), are periodically updated but cannot capture the speed with which remote warfare can transform the conflict landscape. A more responsive system, potentially drawing on real-time conflict monitoring data from organizations such as ACLED (ACLED, 2026) or the Geneva Academy's RULAC platform, would better serve the needs of policymakers, businesses, and humanitarian actors.

Finally, the humanitarian and economic ripple effects of remote warfare should be considered as indicators of a conflicted area's extended scope. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz affected global energy supplies, triggered fuel shortages in Asia, and caused a mass departure of migrant workers from the Gulf (Wikipedia, 2026d). While these effects may not constitute armed conflict in the strict IHL sense, they represent conflict-generated harms that affect civilian populations far beyond the physical theater of operations. A comprehensive framework for conflicted areas should incorporate these cascading effects as part of its analytical scope.

## 7. Conclusion

The concept of conflicted areas stands at a crossroads. Designed for an era of territorially bounded warfare, existing definitions increasingly fail to capture the geographic, technological, and operational realities of twenty-first-century armed conflict. The 2025–2026 Iran war, with its multi-front, multi-domain, and multi-actor character, starkly illustrates these limitations. When a conflict between two primary adversaries can generate lethal military effects in over a dozen countries, disrupt global maritime trade, paralyze critical infrastructure through cyber

operations, and displace hundreds of thousands of people from states that are not parties to the hostilities, it is clear that the traditional territorial paradigm of conflicted areas requires fundamental revision.

This article has argued that a reconceptualized framework for conflicted areas should account for the deterritorialized reach of remote warfare capabilities, the multi-domain character of modern conflict, the role of proxy and surrogate networks in extending conflict geography, the dynamic and rapidly shifting nature of conflict zones, and the cascading humanitarian and economic effects that extend far beyond the physical theater of operations. The Iran war is not an anomaly but rather a harbinger of the kinds of conflicts that existing frameworks must be prepared to address.

The stakes of getting this reconceptualization right are considerable. For international humanitarian law, an inadequate definition of conflict zones may leave civilian populations without the protections they are entitled to. For businesses and investors, an outdated framework may obscure the risks of operating in areas that are nominally at peace but functionally within the zone of active conflict. For development organizations and humanitarian actors, failure to recognize the expanded geography of conflict may lead to inadequate preparedness and response. And for the civilians caught in the crossfire of remote warfare, whether in Tehran, Dubai, or on a container ship in the Strait of Hormuz, the question of whether their location constitutes a conflicted area is not academic. It is, in the most literal sense, a matter of life and death.

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