

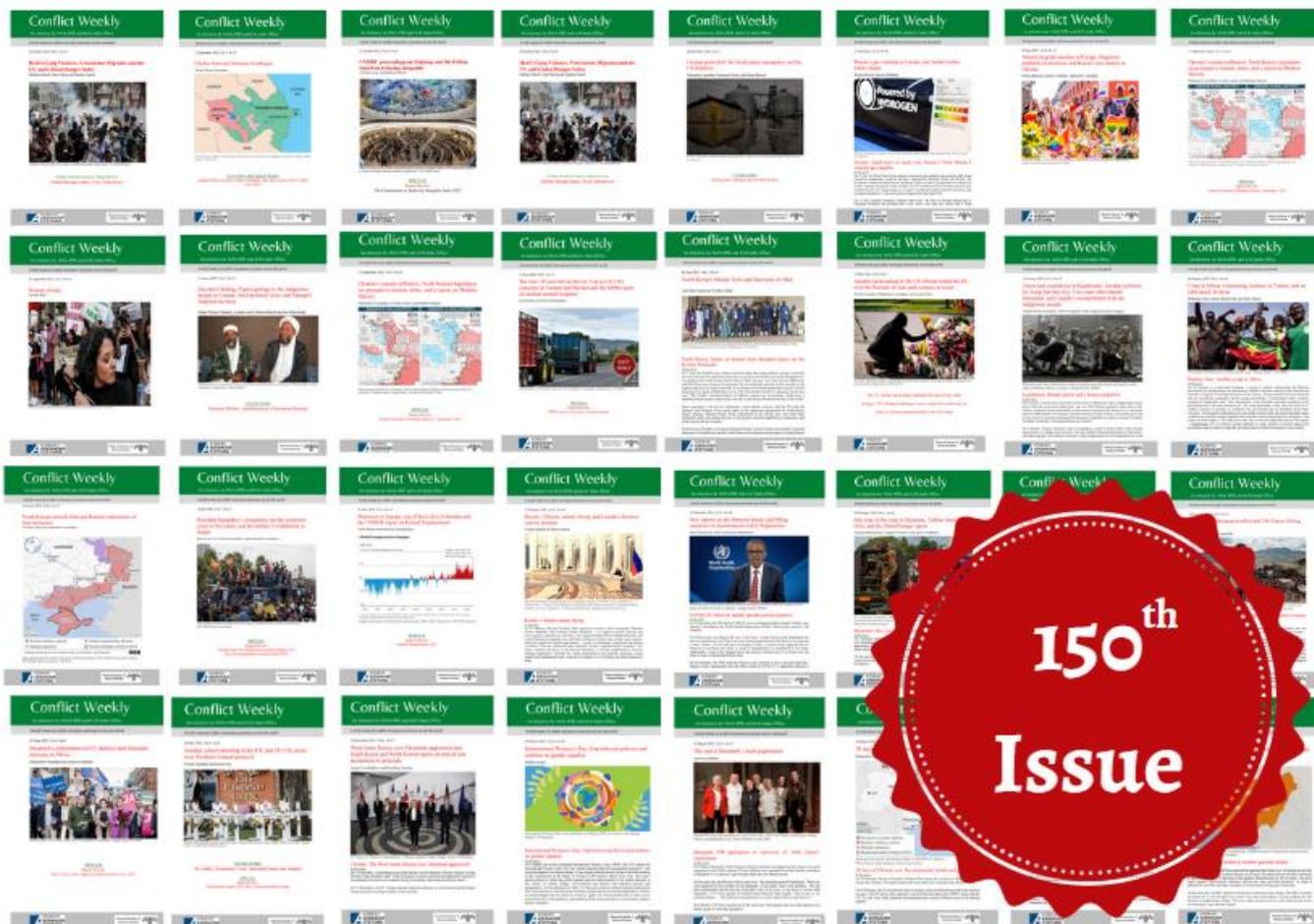
Conflict Weekly

An initiative by NIAS-IPRI and KAS India Office

A brief review of conflict and peace processes across the world

Special Edition

150th Issue of Conflict Weekly



China | North Korea | Myanmar | Sri Lanka | India | Pakistan | Iran
Nagorno-Karabakh | Sahel | Ethiopia | Ukraine |

Gender | Environment | Ethnic Violence
External Interventions | Armed Conflicts | Peace Processes

Release of the 150th issue of Conflict Weekly

In 2022, the world observed a continued decline in global stability. From great power politics to a humanitarian crisis, conflict and violence are globally on rise, pressing on what the UN has warned that peace is more under threat around the world than it has been since the second World War. The war in Ukraine and great power clashes over Taiwan and South China Sea, a humanitarian catastrophe in Afghanistan, Myanmar's political instability, conflict in Yemen, Ethiopia's Tigray conflict, Africa's escalating Islamist insurgencies, escalating gang violence in Haiti and a climate emergency; the reasons behind the conflicts range from internal socio-political issues, territorial disputes, geopolitical competition, Islamist insurgencies to climate change.

The Global Conflict Tracker classifies conflicts as "worsening," "unchanging," and "improving." However, there is currently not a single conflict described as "improving". All the conflicts point either to a failed political system, quest for authority and power, social grievances and majoritarianism or opportunistic interests.

As Conflict Weekly reaches its 150th issue we present a roundup of conflicts from East Asia, Africa to Latin America and issues from science and technology, gender, to climate change.

The Editorial Team

The Conflict Weekly editorial desk is headed by Professor D. Suba Chandran. Prof Chandran is the Dean of School of Conflict and Security Studies at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bengaluru. He is the Head of Conflict Resolution and Peace Research Programme, and the Science, Technology and International Relations Programme at NIAS.

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Conflict Weekly 150th issue

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Editorial

Conflict Weekly is an academic exercise under the International Peace Research Initiative (IPRI) at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS). Housed within the Conflict Resolution and Peace Research programme at the School of Conflict and Security Studies, IPRI has a special focus on studying contemporary conflicts and peace processes across the world. IPRI also aims to build capacity among young scholars to study contemporary conflicts. Besides, IPRI also provides a platform for institutions to come together, to share their research and scholars working on peace and conflict issues.

Conflict Weekly is an important vehicle to address the objectives of IPRI. It follows contemporary conflicts and peace processes on a weekly basis, provide a platform for young scholars to publish their initial findings, and also bring scholars from different institutions.

Published now in collaboration with the India office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), Conflict Weekly has expanded to include special essays, published regularly. The essays are authored by senior and young scholars, and provide a larger space. While the regular publications of Conflict Weekly has a structure – focusing on three questions (In the news, Issues at large, and In perspective), the special essays gives adequate space for the scholars to present a larger case.

The editorial team at NIAS is thankful to GPPAC South Asia for providing the initial support to kickstart the process.

The editorial team is also thankful to the India Office of the KAS, for partnering with IPRI to publish Conflict Weekly now, and also expanding its focus by including cover stories, and by providing support to organize young scholars' workshop, that provides an opportunity to meet, discuss and take the process forward.

About the 150th issue

The Conflict Weekly team approached senior and young scholars to write for the special issue. The special issue has an overview, regional roundups, and a section on specific issues.

Mallika Joseph's commentary titled "The struggle to frame peace," looks at 'peace' as a standalone construct which must be freed from the pangs of war, conflict and violence. She explains peace should be considered as a global common, not a destination, but an inherent right for all humanity, a resource to which every person has equal access.

On East and Southeast Asia, Avishka Ashok's commentary on "China: Global focus and its impact on Xinjiang and the Uyghurs," identified three reasons why the international attention has not resulted in positive outcomes on the human rights issues in Xinjiang. Sandeep Kumar Mishra's commentary titled "East Asia: North Korea's missile provocation," says that North Korean provocations through missile tests cannot be dealt with by joint military exercises, more commitment to alliance, re-introduction of nuclear weapons to the region and by a policy of sanctions-wait. Bibhu Prasad Routray's commentary titled "Myanmar: Resilience of the opposition's armed uprising" tries to explain two questions. Firstly, what keeps the opposition motivated in the face of a virulent scorched earth policy pursued by the military? Secondly, how long can the uprising sustain itself before either emerging victorious or being overwhelmed?

On South Asia, Aparupa Bhattacharjee's commentary titled "Sri Lanka: Significance of Aragalaya as a unifying factor," explains on how the Aragalayas stands out as an organic movement and identifies three reasons why the Aragalaya movement cannot be considered as a factor uniting the nation. Mahesh Bhatta's commentary on "Nepal: An impending economic crisis" focuses on why economists believe that the gravity of the economic situation in Nepal may lead to an economic disaster similar to Sri Lanka. Sourina Bej's commentary titled "Protracted talks and elusive peace in the Naga ceasefire agreement" answers three questions. Vijay Anand Panigrahi's commentary titled "Pakistan:TTP failed peace negotiations, and violence in Swat" looks at how and why the violence in Swat has accelerated in recent months. Abigail Miriam Fernandez's commentary titled "Afghanistan: The Taliban, women, and how history repeats itself"

looks at how women's rights in Afghanistan have deteriorated since the Taliban took over in 2021.

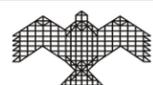
On Central Asia and the Caucasus, Athar Zafar's commentary titled "South Caspasia: Prospects for stable peace" says that by making use of the opportunities presented by geopolitical shifts, both Armenia and Azerbaijan can continuously move towards finalising a peace agreement and contribute to peace and stability as regional cooperation is the way forward for South Caucasus.

On Africa, Apoorva Sudhakar's commentary titled "Africa: An overview and reasons behind persistence of conflicts" identifies major conflicts in Africa and gives four reasons why the conflicts continue. Devjyoti Saha's commentary titled "Africa: The Wagner group, exploitation of conflicts and increased dependency on Russia" explains on Russian Wagner group's involvement in African countries and subsequently how Russia is becoming a major player in the continent. Poulomi Mondal's commentary titled "Africa: End of Operation Barkhane, and future implications for France and Sahel" identifies four factors that led to the termination of the operation. Anu Maria Joseph's commentary titled "Africa: Ethiopia-Tigray ceasefire, and the complex roadmap for peace" identifies four major takeaways of the ceasefire between Ethiopian government and the Tigray forces and concludes that the road to peace is not easy. S Shaji's commentary titled "Africa: A war and truce between Ethiopia and Tigray" identifies that an inclusive policies and genuine federalism that addresses the concerns of various ethnic groups is the route to resolve conflicts in a multi-ethnic state like Ethiopia in the long run.

On Europe and the Americas, Padmashree Anandhan's commentary titled "Europe:Ukraine war and the Nordic" looks into the geographic positioning of the Nordic and brings out the altering security, social, and economic scenarios due to the Ukraine war in the Nordic countries. Sruthi Sadhasivam's commentary titled "Latin America: Four implications of war in Ukraine" identifies and explains on four domains where the Ukraine war has drastically affected multiple Latin American countries: inflation, immigration crisis, oil prices, and economic and health. Porkkodi Ganeshpandian's commentary, "Haiti: Five issues fueling gang violence," identifies Moise's assassination, natural disasters, the prevalence of G9, impact of Russia-Ukraine war and multiple domestic insecurities as the factors leading to increase gang violence in the country.

Outside the regional roundups, Conflict Weekly #150 has a special section on specific issues. Sindhu Radhakrishna's commentary titled "Peace and conflict in human wildlife interactions" highlights three aspects of conflict within Human wildlife interactions. These are naming of a conflict interaction, the role of human beliefs and assumptions, and the role of wildlife in perpetuating conflict. Debangana Chatterjee's commentary titled " Mapping gender: Iran and its 'burning' hijabs" tries to locate the impact on women's human rights by taking Iranian political contention over hijab as a case study. The commentary looks at the attempts to control women's choices by the liberal and illiberal regimes in Iran.

D. Suba Chandran
Apoorva Sudhakar
Anu Maria Joseph



The struggle to frame peace

Mallika Joseph

Senior Fellow, Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP)

In his latest piece in *The Economist*, historian Yuval Noah Harari posits the dawn of “new peace” where the “implausibility of war” is the current dominant thesis that has evolved from the previous prominent understanding of “temporary absence of war.” He argues that this “new peace” is not a “statistical fluke or hippie fantasy,” but a calculated conscious decision of governments across the world in recent decades to budget less on their military “while spending far more on education, health care, and welfare.” Seen against the history of humankind, which is the usual frame of analysis in Harari’s writings, he is right in flagging it as: “an astonishing novelty in human history. For thousands of years, military expenditure was by far the biggest item on the budget of every prince, khan, sultan, and emperor. They hardly spent a penny on education or medical help for the masses.” Also, speaking statistically, “even when taking all types of conflict into account, in the first two decades of the 21st-century human violence has killed fewer people than suicide, car accidents, or obesity-related diseases. Gunpowder has become less lethal than sugar.” How telling, but also how apt.

However, the challenge with this kind of framing of peace is that it downplays several hard-won achievements in contemporary world history that finally and collectively weighed in on the global community and governments across the world to relook at war, its outcomes, and among other things, address the welfare of the people and commit larger budgets on education and healthcare.

It is simply problematic and profoundly simplistic to view peace through the lens of war, especially how various actors across human history have embraced war, abhorred war, or come to wage it through other means. It is akin to describing darkness, where its very presence can only be described as the absence of light and by itself has no meaning or reference.

The framework of peace seen through war also limits assessing the outcomes of war to territorial gains and human casualties. It is a zero-sum game where one side decisively wins, and the other side devastatingly loses. There is little space to navigate and account for the untold human misery bestowed on people just short of them losing their lives; tragically, for a person’s

contribution to the war to be counted, the person must be dead.

To be fair to Harari, he does not seek to belittle the humanness (or lack of it) behind wars. On the contrary, when he says, “gunpowder has become less lethal than sugar,” I believe it is perhaps his way of drawing our attention (which most often is fixated on wars, conflict, and violence) to the undeniable fact that more human lives are lost due to poor choices of food or habits, over which there is little or no national and international outrage. But it is the overall framing of peace within the context of war that is tricky.

Reflecting on Harari’s ideation of peace brings the focus back to why the framing of peace has been problematic, not just now, but down the ages when it became hyphenated with war. The ideologues behind the crusades believed that to bring about peace, wars were needed, to religiously homogenize the world. War, therefore, was a weapon of peace. This gave way to the now popular 20th-century notion of peace as an absence of war, where cooperative measures have ensured there are no further wars between nations, particularly no redrawing of territorial boundaries, and more importantly, the understanding that peace (and for that matter any issue of national interest) can be obtained without going to war.

When the dynamics of security were recast towards the end of the last century, critical questions came to be asked: security for whom? and security from what? As the center of gravity on “whose security” shifted from state-centric territorial and military security to people-centric human security, perhaps the time had come for peace to break itself free from the clutches of war.

Even with a fractured hyphen, questions about peace within alternative discourses triggered fresh thinking. For instance, narratives on the cost of peace came to encompass factors far beyond statistics of casualties and victories. War or conflicts had no definitive victors. It equally beggared all parties – financially, politically, emotionally – and more importantly, depleted resources, devastated the environment, and triggered vast movements of people across continents.

What is the cost of peace? Who is paying/bearing the cost for whose peace? Take the case of Sri Lanka for example, where the war between the government forces and the LTTE ended in 2009. The war was waged to bring peace. When that seemed unlikely, the belief was, the end of the war would bring peace. Thirteen years after the end of that war, the island country and its people are still searching for the promised peace. The tragedy is that peace has eluded not just those who went to war for it, but sadly everyone who paid the price for it with their lives and livelihoods, and most importantly, with their liberties. Incidentally, on 12 November 2022 the Indian Supreme Court released the six convicts serving a life term for the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, a price paid by India for the still elusive peace in Sri Lanka.

The temporariness of peace can also be captured as “renting peace” which again foregrounds various critical questions such as: who owns peace, and who is renting it out to whom? Is the cost of peace too much to afford that people need to settle for leasing/renting it? But more importantly who is determining the value of peace? There are no easy answers to these questions. Yet, they help unpack the narrative of peace without being hyphenated with war.

But, can peace really be something more than its hyphenation with war? For peace to completely

disentangle itself from war, conflict, or violence, there is an urgent need to locate peace within alternative narratives that are based on human rights, human values, human dignity, and human security.

Gendered narratives on global developments offer much insight into not just alternatives to the securitization of peace, but they take head on patriarchies and structured institutional factors that deprive people across the class-caste-community continuum of their basic rights and access to resources. For peace to take root, inequalities of all types between the sexes, genders, generations, and occupations need to be dismantled and social, economic, and political barriers keeping people apart must come down.

Against this background, it is crucial to locate peace as a global common, not a destination, not a tool, but an inherent right for all humanity, a resource to which every person has equal access. But fundamentally, it must be seen as a standalone construct freed from the pangs of war, conflict, and violence.

Mallika Joseph is currently a Senior Fellow at Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP). She is also an Adjunct Professor at NIAS, and Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Policy Research.

China: Global Focus and its impact on Xinjiang and the Uyghurs

Avishka Ashok

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In October 2022, the United Nations Human Rights Council rejected the draft resolution to hold a debate on the alleged suppression of the minority Muslim community in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region of China. The resolution was initiated by the US, the UK, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Canada and was co-sponsored by Turkey after the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) released a report on the violation of human rights in Xinjiang in August 2022.

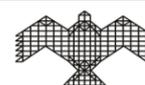
The report by the OHCHR is neither the first nor the only report pointing fingers at China over its aggression in the region. Countries like the US, the UK, Australia have released reports of their own while other countries like Japan, the EU and Canada have taken constitutional action against

China by passing resolutions and banning products manufactured in Xinjiang. However, despite the global awareness regarding Xinjiang, the UN human rights body was unable to initiate an official investigation into the issue.

[The global attention on Xinjiang](#)

International reports on Xinjiang

In 2019, the US Department of State published the International Religious Freedom Report by the Office of International Religious Freedom which examined the accessibility of religious freedom for the Uyghurs in the region and concluded that the Chinese government enforced multiple restriction on Islamic practices of the community. Recently, in August 2022, the Global Engagement Centre, another entity of the US State Department, published a report accusing China of changing the



public opinion with false facts and lies. The British Parliament also published a report in July 2021 titled “The UK’s Responsibility to Act on Atrocities in Xinjiang and Beyond”.

Constitutional action against China

In January 2021, the Canadian government adopted measures to prevent engagement with goods and services that were an outcome of the human rights violation in Xinjiang. It also passed the Uyghur Forced Labour Prevention Act in December 2021 which was implemented soon after. In 2020, the European Union adopted a resolution on forced labour and the condition of the Uyghur community in China, while Japan passed a resolution in February 2022 and promised to take strict action against China for its actions in Xinjiang.

Media coverage of Xinjiang

Other than reports and resolutions by countries and international organisations, the media also played a heavy hand in highlighting the plight of the minorities in China. There have been multiple investigative media reports and interviews of Uyghurs which helped disseminate information regarding the re-education camps, restrictive policies of the government, internal displacement, religious constraints and more. The World Uyghur Congress and its President Dolkun Isa have also been influential in popularizing the plight of the community in China. Prior to the UNHRC’s rejection of the proposed debate, the World Uyghur Congress visited countries and urged them to support the proposal.

Impact of the global focus on Xinjiang

The recent spotlight on Xinjiang has helped magnify the Uyghur community’s demand for religious freedom and their plea for help. However, the outcomes of this attention have been miniscule. The community could not initiate an official investigation into the forced detention and violent repression in the Xinjiang region. Internationally, there has been increasing support extended to Dolkun Isa and his aides in terms of financial assistance. Yet, when it comes to political support at international and multilateral organizations, the Uyghurs are unsuccessful in achieving their basic goals.

So far, the positive outcomes of the global focus have been the resolutions passed by independent countries to cease the sale of products that have been forcibly made under horrendous conditions within the re-education camps. The global focus has also put pressure on China to retrack its

exploitative actions and display transparency in its handling of the minorities within China. The US, the EU, the UK, and Canada have also sanctioned CPC members responsible for the mistreatment of the Uyghurs and for concealing the oppression in Xinjiang. Nonetheless, these actions have hardly caused any damage to the CPC leaders or to China.

Reasons why the international attention has not resulted in positive outcomes

First, China’s support group. From the latest rejection of the UNHRC proposal, it became clear that China has successfully created a support system of its own in international organizations such as the United Nations. China has been providing unconditional and hefty loans to countries in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. When countries are unable to pay the loans in time, they pay back in loyalty. As a result, China received a noticeable number of votes in favour of not holding a debate on the Xinjiang issue.

Second, China’s position in the international order. China in the 21st century under the leadership of Xi Jinping is inordinately different from the China of the late 20th century. The country is no longer plagued with food insecurity, a below average and poor economy, and extreme political instability. Under Xi Jinping, China aims to replace the US as the global superpower. Countries dealing with China are aware of this ambition and believe that it is not an entirely impossible scenario in the future. The Asian superpower also holds immense power in the United Nations as a permanent member of the Security Council. Given these circumstances, China’s partners do not wish to hurt the CPC’s sentiments for an issue in which they don’t see a positive end.

Third, dependency on trade. China’s international partners rely heavily on Beijing because of the trade ties. For ASEAN, China is the biggest trading partner. In 2021, China replaced the US as the EU largest trading partner while also being the US’ largest trading partner. For Africa, Latin America and the Middle East, China has more foothold than most of the European countries as well as the US. This trading relationship has created a complex understanding between the countries, wherein they recognize each other’s red lines and promise to stay away for the purpose of trade continuity and economic growth.

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East Asia: North Korea's Missile Provocations

Sandip Kumar Mishra

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So far, 2022 has seen the most missiles launches globally in human history and the biggest contributor among them has been North Korea. A flurry of North Korea missile tests indicates dire security situation on the Korean peninsula and the region. On 2 November 2022, North Korea tested 23 missiles. Apart from a test of long-range missile on 4 October 2022 over Japan, North Korea had 9 missile tests only in October 2022 and 30 missile tests in just five days of November 2022. Overall, North Korea had around 73 missile tests in 2022. Earlier North Korea had maximum tests in 2019 when it tested around 26 missiles in a calendar year and 22. North Korea also had its first intermediate range test in 2016 and 3 intermediate range and 3 intercontinental range missile tests in 2017. In 2022, there have been four intercontinental and one intermediate range missile tests among the known tests.

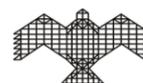
Apart from the sheer number, these tests make it obvious that the North Korean missile programme has undoubtedly become increasingly sophisticated. North Korean now possesses intercontinental missiles like the Hwasong-15, and Hwasong-17, which can reach up to 15000 kilometres. North Korea had several intermediate range missiles along with medium and short-range missiles and they had also tried to develop submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs). Even though there are doubts about the efficacy of a few of these missiles, it is obvious that North Korea has come a long way in its missile programme. Their missile capacity undoubtedly poses grave risk for the security in the region. Furthermore, the vengeance expressed through these tests also underlines that North Korea does not care about regional players and sanctions.

The objective of North Korean missile tests appears to be multiple:

First, North Korea, through these tests, wants to reach a critical level from where it would be a long-range missile possessing state and it would only negotiate arms control in any future talks rather than the complete abolition of its missile and nuclear programmes. North Korea wants to hasten the process of nuclear and missile development as its neighbouring countries may try to stop it mid-way and push for reversal. Thus, it has been trying to achieve something in a short span, which otherwise would have taken a long time.

Second, North Korea through these tests wants to show its displeasure with the joint military exercises of the US and South Korea after coming of President Yoon Suk-yeol in power in South Korea in May 2022. North Korea claimed that it has fired more than 80 missiles between 2 and 5 November 2022 in response to the 'reckless military hysteria' of the US and its allies in the region. It is important to note that the US and South Korea had 'Vigilant Storm' drills last week and North Korea considered it 'open provocation' for the missile tests. US-South Korea had several joint military drills in the recent months. The latest of them have been a large-scale 'Vigilant Storm' joint drill which happened from 31 October to 5 November 2022. North Korea had warned on 31 October 2022 that these large-scale military exercises are provocation and it would respond by 'more powerful follow-up measures.' The US and South Korean troops also had a 12-day Hoguk 22 field exercises which had mock amphibious landings and river crossing drills which ended on 28 October 2022. On 26 September 2022, the US aircraft carrier Ronald Regan and its associated ships had a joint military exercise with South Korean forces for four days. It was the first US-South Korean military drill involving a US aircraft carrier since 2017. On 29 August 2022, the US and South Korea have had their largest joint military drill *Ulchi Freedom Shield*, which was a resumption of their annual summertime joint exercises after a hiatus of five years. Overall, after coming to power, the Yoon Suk-yeol administration in South Korea in May 2022 the US-South Korean joint drills have been normalised and even expanded and North Korean missile tests are apparently a response to them.

Third, North Korea also wants to respond through missile tests recent churning in South Korea and Japan to have more credible nuclear deterrent. South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol expressed his willingness of redeployment of US tactical nuclear weapons on the peninsula and in Japan also there have been demand for 'nuclear sharing'. It seems that both South Korea and Japan is less than satisfied with the US 'nuclear umbrella' and they want either 'nuclear sharing' or tactical nuclear weapons in their countries. North Korea through its missile tests intends to convey that increased belligerence of South Korea, the US and Japan unilaterally or multilaterally would not have any impact on it. Rather, it would lead to increased missile and nuclear activities of North Korea.



Fourth, it could also be speculated that North Korea is aware that its nuclear and missiles are not going to be accepted in the current context. However, if South Korea and Japan also resort to similar activities because of their own aggressive policy or because of the flurry of missile tests by North Korea and acquire tactical nuclear weapons or 'nuclear sharing', Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programmes would not appear so out of place.

Fifth, North Korea is aware that both China and Russia have been going through a tough time because of the pandemic, the US-China competition, and Ukraine crisis. North Korea wants to use this window to enhance its military capabilities through these missile tests as well as try to forge closer contacts with its two old friends. There are reports that North Korea has openly supported the Russian stand and provided help to Russia in the Ukraine crisis.

Without comprehending North Korea's objective, it would be impossible to deal with its missile

tests. It must be acknowledged that the US, South Korea, and Japan have been unable to read the security calculus of the Korean peninsula, the region and their approaches to deal with North Korea must be reviewed. North Korean provocations through missile tests cannot be dealt by joint military exercises, more commitment to alliance, re-introduction of nuclear weapons to the region and by a policy of sanctions-wait. South Korea, the US and Japan must evaluate whether their approaches and moves towards North Korea are part of the solution or part of the problem. Until such evaluations are done and a long-term coordinated and pragmatic approach is arrived at, North Korea's provocative acts and levels of its missile and nuclear capabilities would keep increasing.

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Myanmar: Resilience of the Opposition's Armed Uprising

Bibhu Prasad Routray

Director, Mantraya

The civil war situation in Myanmar is getting bloodier by the day. Since capturing power by the February 2021 coup, the military junta has overcome its sense of surprise with the determination shown by the opposition with the launch of an unrelenting phase of violence. It has repeatedly vowed to crush the 'terrorism' unleashed by the People's Defence Forces (PDFs) and the Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs). While the obligation of the regime to protect its interests is understandable, two questions regarding the opposition's tactics and strategy seek answers. Firstly, what keeps the opposition motivated in the face of a virulent scorched earth policy pursued by the military? Secondly, how long can the uprising sustain itself before either emerging victorious or being overwhelmed?

In reference to the first question: the motivation to keep the banner of uprising flying seems to be the outcome of the coalescing of two diverse senses: of hurt and betrayal for the Bamar pro-democracy civilian and politically motivated groups, and an enduring anti-military outlook of some of the EAOs. The pro-democracy groups and the supporters of the National League for

Democracy (NLD) have been outraged with the military's move to overturn the results of the 2020 general elections, which not only provides a huge setback to the prospect of democracy in the country, but also cast its shadows over a lot many associated freedoms and opportunities that came with it. For these groups and people, it is a fight to preserve the freedom they experienced for the past decade.

Some of the EAOs who have allied their causes with that of the PDFs, on the other hand, have been fighting the military junta for decades to protect, what they consider, their inherent right to autonomy over their land and natural resources. Barring a few recent years, such fighting has been a persistent reality in the country's periphery, so is the violence, loss of human lives, and property. For them, the camaraderie with the PDFs is about continuing the fight, with a renewed momentum. Victory against the junta may end up endorsing their long-held demand. The parallel National Unity Government's acceptance of the EAOs demands gives them such hope.

Part of the answer to the complex second question lies in the previous paragraphs. The coming together of the battle hardened EAOs and the tech savvy and motivated civilians is the key factor behind the sustenance of the armed uprising so far. While the EAOs bring in the elements of perseverance and commitment to go on fighting with the military even while suffering losses, the PDFs use their educational background, exposure to the way the military functions, and their networking capacity within the country and beyond to whip up and support a passionate fight. The EAOs like the Kachins, Rakhines, Karens and the Shans provide examples of survival for decades while pitted against a militarily superior adversary. The PDFs, over time and with the help of the EAOs, have harnessed the skill of converting odd ambushes into a full-fledged urban insurgency in the heart of Myanmar. It is this combination of unique skill set that makes them an effective and possibly a durable fighting force.

It is this combination of typical and complimentary strength, which manifests itself in a constant upgradation in the quality of attacks against the military and their perceived associates. The parcel bomb explosion in the high security Insein Prison which killed eight persons on 19 October and the attack on the Immigration office in the southern Mon State town of Ye on 3 August, which killed five officials are among the large number of attacks carried out by the PDFs. In addition to killing police personnel, ward administrators and suspected informers of the junta, recent successes of the PDFs include the killing of a Former Brigadier-General Ohn Thwin and his son-in-law in September.

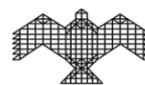
The strategy of carrying out random attacks of opportunity has been replaced with one that is intended to spread fear among the military officials and their supporters, but also prevents the junta from going ahead with its plan of holding a general election in 2023. The EAOs are doing their bit in the periphery by inflicting high casualties on the military. For instance, between 20 and 30 October, intense violence in Kachin, Karen, Rakhine, and Kayah states and Mandalay, Sagaing, Magwe, Bago and Tanintharyi regions, reportedly claimed the lives of 162 soldiers. Another 67 soldiers including an army major were killed between 3 and 7 November.

A critical contribution of the Bamar young, enthusiast, and tech savvy participants, hither to

relatively absent in the EAOs decades-long fight with the military, has been to successfully highlight their achievements and the brutalities inflicted upon the country by the military's war. Multiple websites, blogs, news sources, and social media profiles and handles, either run or supported by them, continue to amplify such incidents. As a result, every single incident of violence gets reported and is read by the world. These possibly are among the reasons for the continued condemnation of the junta and imposition of sanctions by several countries. Statements by the UN and its human rights experts have condemned the junta's attacks on schools, civilians, and its attempts to establish a 'digital dictatorship'. Although none of the countries have recognized the opposition's National Unity Government (NUG), there is enough evidence that the networking capacities of the PDFs and their supporters have ensured a steady unofficial flow of resources for their war efforts.

A lethal combination, however, does not necessarily become a winning combination. The PDFs and the EAOs face two drawbacks as they challenge a militarily superior adversary. First, despite the violence and human misery, Myanmar is not a priority for the international community. The resolve shown by Russia and China in protecting the junta and supporting its war making capacities is hardly matched by the sanctions imposed by countries like the US, UK, Australia etc. The ASEAN has struggled to frame a unified policy on Myanmar. Secondly, the opposition's war against the military is still 11 localized, although of late it seems to have expanded into the Shan state as well. However, a considerable number of EAOs continue to remain rather indifferent to the happenings. The junta has been trying and partially succeeding in driving a wedge between the nearly two dozen EAOs, which operate in the country. On the other hand, there is little evidence that the multiple PDFs are working under a unified strategy directed by the NUG. In view of these, passion and individual courage assume even more criticality for continuing the uprising. For how long that can stand the onslaught of the junta and loss of lives remains a big question.

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Sri Lanka: Significance of Aragalaya as a unifying factor

Aparupa Bhattacharjee

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In 2022, Sri Lanka witnessed the unthinkable. Gotabaya Rajapaksa came to power in 2019, promising to strengthen national security. This garnered him 52.25 per cent of votes, which was more than the majority. The scenario changed on 14 July 2022, he was removed from power, and he had to escape in the face of the 'Janatha Aragalaya' movement or the people's struggle. On 9 April, sporadic protests that were happening across the island due to scarcity of basic necessities and increased power cuts got; thousands gathered in the Galle Face, Colombo and called for the removal of the President, shouting in unison 'Gota Go Gama' (Gotabaya go back to the village). The governmental response to crush it backfired, and the masses retaliated with violence and vandalism, forcing all the Rajapaksas to step back from power.

In a country that has witnessed two armed uprisings and a civil war that ended in 2009, protests and dissent are not unique. Since Gotabaya came to power, there were several other major protests. In 2021, several farmers protested against the abrupt decision to shift to organic farming, protests by garment workers, school teachers and university students for salary hikes and lack of spending on higher education. However, despite these, Aragalaya stands out as an organic movement, facilitated only with the help of social media. This leaderless movement drew masses from every section of society.

Did Aragalaya bring the majority and minorities together?

Since its independence in 1948, ethnic differences have been a cause of conflict. The politics and several governmental policies acted as the reason for the widening of the faultlines. This resulted in a civil war that lasted four decades. Over the years, emphasis on majority ethnic-religion-based politics and covert support for radical Buddhist groups added a new dimension to the conflict making it ethno-religious. The Easter attack in 2019 acted as a catalyst, further marginalising the Muslims, and legitimising attacks and repression against them in the name of national security.

Thus, protests by ethnic and religious minorities were common in Sri Lanka. For example, the Malaiyah Tamil youth protest in 2018 or P2P (Pottuvil to Polikandy) five-days march in 2021, which was held by the religious minorities to assert their rights. Unlike these protests, the Aragalaya movement was a comparative success,

as for the first time, the economic crisis affected everyone, rich or poor, majority or minority. This unity was visible and well-projected. Several initiatives were taken to encourage civilians from minority communities to join. Such as the Catholic priests and Buddhist clergy joined the Muslim leaders to break their fast in the Islamic holy month of Ramzan. Storytelling sessions by filmmaker King Ratnam, emphasised the pains of the Tamil communities. These initiatives encouraged more Tamils and Muslims to join the movement leaving behind their apprehensions. The movement also facilitated the commemorations of important dates such as the third anniversary of the Easter Attack on 21 April and 'Mullivikkal Remembrance Day' in memory of Tamil civilians killed in the war on 18 May. Thus, the movement had done the exceptional by unifying the majority and minorities to stand up for the same cause. However, the larger question remains, will this solidarity resolve the ethno-religious conflicts in the country?

Is Aragalaya uniting the nation? Answer is no

The reasons are threefold. First, Aragalaya, seen as a platform for unity, was not homogeneous. The goals differed, as economic collapse may have been the trigger for the movement, but the causes were different for each group. Sinhalese wanted the removal of Gotabaya due to his failure to retain economic stability. Whereas, for several Tamils and Muslims he was the propagator of war crimes and violence against the community along with his failure to be a good leader. The 'Gota Go Gama'-demand for the removal of Gotabaya Rajapaksa remained the primary demand, but there are other demands too. Some demanded the removal of the Rajapaksa clan, or some members evident from another famous slogan, 'Kaputu kak Kak...Basil Basil' targeted particularly Basil Rajapaksa, the previous Finance Minister. Similarly, some demanded abolition of the Executive Presidency, some for a change of the system, and some, like the Tamils, the repeal of the draconian terrorism law became a secondary demand. Thus, the varied demands made the difference evident although it was perceived to bring the majority and minority together.

Second, the resolution of the 'immediate cause' will not assist in resolving the conflict. The lack of necessities was the trigger for this movement. Every section of society was impacted by this crisis. In the future, in case of economic recovery, only the 'immediate cause' gets resolved, and the

larger causes of the conflict remain unaffected. The unified voice or the initiatives taken to highlight ethno-religious harmony in Aragalaya remains incomplete unless initiatives are taken to repair the existing faultlines. As this movement cannot erase the horrors of war crimes and the lack of justice for the deaths and disappearance of several Tamil civilians. Neither will it be able to strike out the memories of the Aluthgama riots and Digana carnage in 2014 and 2018, respectively, the segregation of the society, attacks on Mosques, and the forced burials during the Pandemic from the Muslim community.

Third, the movement may change the government but their approach towards minorities remains the same. The larger causes for this conflict could be resolved if the governmental approach changes and divisive politics is discouraged. Nevertheless, there is not much hope for such a change in Sri Lanka. The politics in the country thrive on 'upholding' and 'protection' of the Sinhala Buddhist majority that alienates minorities. Rajapaksas were the flag bearers of this kind of political approach and Gotabaya came to power catering to this divisive politics in 2019. Currently, Rajapaksas are not and may not come back to power. But things will probably not

change. This is evident from Sri Lanka's "inadequate" initiative to implement the 13th Amendment, 'meaningful devolution' and provincial elections. This was pointed out by the UN Human rights Council while voting on a new resolution on Sri Lanka on 6 October 2022. 'Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka' the new resolution adopted by the council was "categorically rejected" by the current government. Additionally, Ranil Wickremesinghe's proximity to the Rajapaksas and apathy to dissent further diminishes any hope for the resolution of the larger causes.

The momentum of the Aragalaya movement may have faded out to an extent but it does not imply that the government has achieved success in economic recovery. If there is a rise of the Aragalaya movement again, it will not be surprising. Sri Lanka should be prepared for another year of a cycle of conflict, each being the cause and the result of the other.

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Nepal: An impending economic crisis

Mahesh Bhatta

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In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing trade deficit, declining foreign exchange reserve, skyrocketing inflation, liquidity crunch, rising fuel prices amid the Russia-Ukraine war crippled Nepal's economy. Internally, the state's poor leadership and rampant corruption have led Nepal towards an economic crisis.

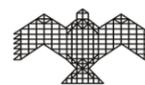
Since 2021, Nepalese economists and experts have been warning the government of an economic crisis. Today, liquidity crunch affecting banks and financial institutions is at an all-time high. Despite government regulations to curb the currency flow, imports have increased, depleting the nation's foreign exchange reserves. The gravity of the economic situation has economists believing that Nepal may suffer an economic disaster like Sri Lanka's.

The looming economic crisis: Five issues

Following are the key issues that characterize the looming economic crisis in Nepal.

First, the declining foreign currency reserves. The foreign currency reserve declined by 13.1 per cent to NPR 1.215 trillion in the previous fiscal year. Nepal saw a net loss of foreign currency of NPR 183.23 billion during the previous year, according to an annual report on the 'Current Macroeconomic and Financial Situation of Nepal' released by Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) in August 2022. Nepal had foreign exchange reserves worth NPR 1.399 trillion as of mid-July 2021. In US dollar terms, the foreign exchange reserves fell 18.9 per cent to USD 9.54 billion. The NRB estimates that the country can afford to import goods and services for over seven months using the foreign currency reserves.

To prevent the foreign exchange reserves from falling further, the government banned imports of luxury items in April until mid-December, the ban may be extended. The Department of Customs reports that compared to the same period in the previous fiscal year, Nepal's imports in the first two months of the current fiscal year (ending in



mid-September) decreased by 13 per cent to NPR 273.59 billion.

Second, rising gasoline prices. Fuel prices have significantly risen in Nepal and around the world since the COVID-19 breakout, further exacerbated by the Russia-Ukraine war. Since the start of 2022, Nepal has experienced price increases for gasoline, diesel, and LPG by 43 per cent, 57 per cent, and 14 per cent, respectively. Because of this, transportation expenses have surged, pushing the price of industrial production, food, and other necessities.

Third, the Russia-Ukraine war. The war's global repercussions have influenced Nepal as well, posing new economic difficulties for an already-staggering economy. As a direct result of the disruption of exports of crude oil, natural gas, grains, fertilizer, and metals, prices of energy, food, and commodities have risen. As large agricultural exporters, Russia and Ukraine account for 56 per cent of the world's exports of sunflower oil, 16 per cent of the world's exports of corn, and 25 per cent of the world's exports of wheat.

Fourth, the NPR depreciation. The value of the US dollar in Nepal has recently risen to a record high at NPR 132. Since the crisis between Russia and Ukraine, the Indian rupee, to which the Nepali Rupee is pegged, has also experienced a sharp decline in value. As a result, if the dollar continues to appreciate, Nepali importers, who now pay high rates for importing goods, will have to pay more. Given that most of Nepal's essentials, including food, medicine, and gasoline, are imported, a stronger dollar would not only cause a wider Balance of Payment but would also increase the cost of commodities.

Fifth, the liquidity crisis. Since the economy in Nepal began to recover after the Covid-19 lockdowns, the liquidity crisis has worsened. Due to delayed deposit collections, Nepalese commercial banks have struggled to keep the credit-deposit (CD) ratio below 90 per cent. Banks have raised interest rates to attract deposits. Higher borrowing expenses result from higher interest rates. As a result, local industries now face higher manufacturing costs, in turn raising the market price of the commodities they produce.

Over the past year, loan issuance has increased but the money has not been utilized in productive

sectors, thereby leading to a liquidity crisis. It began with the Covid-19 pandemic. Beginning March 2020, the government shut down the country for three months, followed by a series of partial lockdowns, with little regard for the economic crisis it would cause. To assist the businesses which were affected, the NRB refinanced approximately NPR 153 billion into businesses such as tourism and small and medium enterprises at a five per cent interest rate. However, because the borrowing rates were low, people began to invest money intended for their businesses on shares. The funds were also utilized to invest in real estate, purchase land and luxury items, indicating that individuals could spend more on luxury goods. This led to an increase in imports, which ultimately impacted the foreign reserves and resulted in a current account deficit.

Furthermore, NRB statistics show that paddy and rice imports have been increasing year after year. Nepal imported grains, rice, and paddy worth NPR 45.28 billion in the first eleven months of the current fiscal year (2021/22), the majority of which came from India. As a result of rising food costs, several countries, including India, began imposing export curbs on food grains. India, which has already halted wheat and sugar exports, is expected to do the same with rice and paddy, potentially causing a food crisis in Nepal. In addition, shortages of key food items would promote black markets, forcing the general population to pay more for goods. Moreover, the existing financial crisis and rising commodity prices has added to the government's woes, just before the national and provincial elections.

Silver Linings

The influx of tourists and foreigners into Nepal has recently revealed silver linings in the country's economic difficulties. The country has been witnessing dire financial crunches since a couple of months. However, the situation is moderately improving compared to the situation in early 2022. Nepal still has a potential to recover from the economic crisis and avoid becoming another Sri Lanka. The government should adopt strong economic policies and offers subsidies to stimulate small companies, agriculture, tourism, and remittance inflows through supportive policies and plans.

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India: Protracted Talks and Elusive Peace in the Naga ceasefire agreement

Sourina Bej

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As the NSCN (I-M) marked the 25th anniversary of the Indo-Naga ceasefire agreement on 1 August 2022, the longest insurgency and ethnic conflict in India entered its third decade of peace talks. On 25 July 1997, the NSCN (I-M) signed a ceasefire agreement with the Government of India that heralded the start of the Indo-Naga peace talks and opened an avenue to find a political solution to the long-standing demands of a separate homeland for the Nagas. The National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah), aka. NSCN(I-M) has been the primary actor in the peace talks, while simultaneously sustaining an armed insurgency along with determining the terms in the peace process. Speaking on the occasion of the anniversary, the leader of NSCN (I-M), Muivah, rued the progress in the Naga peace process after 25 years. After over 80 rounds of talks since 1997, the parties are yet to reach a mutually agreed peace accord. On 3 August 2015 when the Indian government signed the Framework Agreement with the NSCN (I-M), it ushered hope for a solution, instead a stalemate continues after the state interlocutor Governor Ravi failed to tailor-down the demands of NSCN (I-M) for a separate flag and a constitution.

On 25th anniversary, it necessitates one to take a critical look at the ceasefire agreement and the peace talks that followed; how the ceasefire agreement shaped the peace talks with NSCN-IM? Why has the ceasefire never ceased the violence? And what further challenges remain in the peace talks ahead?

25 years on: Conflict Expansion and Antagonistic Peace Parleys

Expansion of demand, heterogenous identity assertions

In the past 25 years, NSCN(I-M)'s demand for a separate homeland has been contested and transformed as the outfit engaged in the peace talks with the State. Question remains on what constitutes a unified Naga ethnicity? With the Indian census data not corresponding or documenting the 'Naga' as one collective tribe, no official data is yet to legitimize the demand of a single homeland. Instead competing identity assertions from different ethnic groups in Nagaland has emerged as a challenge to the NSCN(I-M). The implementation of the 1997 ceasefire agreement and subsequently the AFSPA, has defined the pockets of armed conflict and

thereby confined the boundaries for identity assertion. In an effort to territorialize the demand for Nagalim, NSCN(I-M) released a map in its 2002 press document, which till date, is criticized by other political groups in Nagaland and actors in the peace process. Yet there is little doubt that in the two decades of the conflict, the Nagas have developed a strong sense of themselves. The demand for recognition of a homeland has evolved through fragmentation and contestations through great loss of life from the armed violence.

Military status quo, peace bargains

The 1997 ceasefire that opened a channel for dialogue also established non-formal and tacit agreement of military status-quo between the Indian security forces and the NSCN(I-M). The period of ceasefire brought the leaders to the peace table, provided an immediate relief for new recruits and a return to armed insurgency remained when a peace deadlock prevailed. Depending on the political bargaining in the peace table, the ceasefire served as a tool for status quo in which low casualties meant better progress in talks. Still in the context of continued insurgent activities, some patterns of violence formally governed by the ceasefire ground rules, such as designated camps, became more acceptable than others.

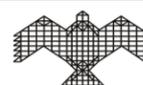
The expanding role of the state

During 1994– 1996, army operations sought to create their own order through counter insurgency tactical measures by bringing the group to the negotiating table as quickly as possible. After the ceasefire agreement with NSCN(I-M) in August 1997, the central government expanded its negotiations with other armed groups with more clear clauses on the implementation of the ceasefire; the first clause of the ceasefire signed between Delhi and the other insurgent group NSCN (Khaplant) in April 2001 referred to its restriction to Nagaland alone. In 2015, the Framework Agreement with NSCN(I-M) also followed a similar ambiguity, a familiar technique the State has used in its negotiations with various groups.

Long road to a political solution: Further challenges

Restlessness with NSCN(I-M)

With the completion of 25 years of the ceasefire agreement, one can observe a growing fatigue



with the NSCN(I-M) as new actors have seen the group as rigid and non-evolving in its stakes in the peace talks. In a strongly worded press statements, Muivah addressed on Naga Independence Day claiming that the 25 years of the ceasefire as meaningless without a solution. Underneath the ceasefire agreement, one could notice that the position of the NSCN(I-M) today is very delicate. It is led by a Tangkhul from Manipur, for whom it is difficult to abandon the demand for a Greater Nagalim. Yet, with each talk, the relevance of a unified homeland has been contested and reconstructed.

New actors and demands in the peace talks

Along with the NSCN(I-M), the peace process has witnessed new actors joining the negotiation for a peace accord. The Naga Mothers' Association, Naga Hoho, the Naga Students' Federation, and the Naga Peoples' Movement for Human Rights has simultaneously been in a dialogue with the state, thereby challenging the stakes of the insurgent groups as against the demands from the civil society. Similarly, the Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organization's demand for 'Frontier Nagaland' since 2010 also raised a question about the existing idea of inclusivity among the Nagas.

Peace fatigue and mistrust against the state

The dialogue with the NSCN(I-M) has become murkier. Even as the dust has settled over Governor Ravi's ouster from the positions of both the governorship of Nagaland and interlocutorship, the peace talks has not returned

to its past rigour. The present situation is shrouded by mistrust. The latest pertains to a press statement by the NSCN(I-M) that alleges the Indian security forces of scuttling the peace talks.

Regional challenges

Territorial unification which has long been the demand in the peace talks has been challenged by the demands for integration. The NSCN(I-M) prioritizes integration over unification, while the people of Nagaland have treated unification as a logical precursor to integration. For a decade, it has been a contradiction in the peace talks in Nagaland that is structured around the NSCN(I-M) dominated by Tangkhuls of Ukhrul district of Manipur. The Greater Nagalim map proposed by the NSCN(I-M) includes swathes of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Manipur. And a challenge to these territorial changes has been further challenged by the neighbouring states in the region.

With the 25th anniversary, the prospect of a solution to the Naga political demands still has no clear answers. The NSCN-IM remains firm over its demands for a separate flag and constitution for the Nagas while the hope for a separate homeland continues to live in the minds and aspirations of the people.

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Pakistan: TTP, failed peace negotiations, and violence in Swat

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The determined plans of the Pakistani government to curb unnecessary violence and terrorist activities in the country have fallen short on many occasions this year. The best of these activities and fatalities were caused by the deadly terror outfit, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). TTP's stronghold has been increasing recently in various regions of Pakistan, especially in the Swat valley of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, where a series of attacks have claimed several lives. In 2022, the TTP carried out six such attacks in the Swat district, killing around 12 people and injuring several others. Moreover, areas in Balochistan were almost as severely affected, further escalating the government's fear regarding the TTP and its affiliates' expansion into

the deeper regions of Pakistan with the support of the Afghani Taliban.

The chaos in Swat valley peaked in October when a school van was attacked by a terrorist claiming the driver's life and injuring two kids. While in a similar incident, another kid was shot dead by terrorists in the Waliabad area of Swat District. These continuous attacks on civilians gave birth to an atmosphere of fear in society, and thus, led to a massive protest. Thousands of people joined the protest and flooded the streets of Nishat Chowk, demanding the government enforce safety measures and secure the people's lives from such threats.

The resurgence of TTP

Formed in 2007 as a militant organization to challenge the state and implement Sharia law in Pakistan, the TTP set sail in 2008 but did not resort to using arms just yet. However, the TTP got stronger with time and started to change its strategies and efforts to turn the anti-state movement into an armed rebellion. Their momentum peaked and took to the headlines with the assassination attempt on Malala Yousafzai in 2012. Still, the Pakistani military's tireless efforts, combined with the United States drone attacks, led to a decline in their prominence after 2014.

In 2021, the re-establishment of Taliban rule in Afghanistan played a significant role in reviving the presence and prominence of the TTP in Pakistan. The TTP has previously claimed the Afghani Taliban to be its inspiration and thus have a haven under their rule. The comeback however, has been more robust than the past TTP since they have merged with ten other militant outfits fighting the Pakistani state. These ten outfits include three Al Qaeda associates and four TTP factions split from them in 2014. With its stronghold in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, the TTP moves more freely along the border and manages its militant resources and training. This strengthened resurgence of the TTP has resulted in accelerated attacks in Pakistan since the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan.

As mentioned earlier, the TTP's strategy has evolved, and so have its demands. Earlier, the primary targets of the TTP used to be civilians in the hope that it would pressure the government to give in to their demands. However, a change in their 2018 manifesto suggested attacking military superiors and government officials to imply that its focus is strictly a fight against the state. Additionally, the TTP claimed that it had limited its agenda to Pakistan and nothing beyond that, which implied that the Pakistani government wouldn't get any assistance for anti-terror operations from the likes of the US, which has previously helped with drone attacks.

In the case of Swat in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the TTP has been deliberately trying to make its resurgence visible with frequent attacks in the district. These recent attacks emphasize TTP's ability to move inside Pakistan and operate accordingly. Since Swat remains closer to the border from Afghanistan, it has witnessed the maximum number of deaths in the past year compared to other provinces of Pakistan. Furthermore, the Swat region was a TTP stronghold in the initial years of its inception until the Pakistani government forced them out. However, during peace negotiations between the

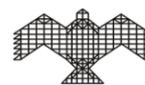
government and the TTP, the state allowed many members of the latter to revisit their families. This move by the state backfired, as when these members visited their homes in the Swat valley, they regrouped and revived their influence in the region. To keep the civilians calm, the government tries to deny any involvement of the TTP in such cases and pass it off as individually targeted attacks. However, the people of Swat have showcased their disapproval of government affirmations by staging a massive protest demanding better security.

In perspective

Firstly, the most apparent reason for this recent resurgence is Pakistan's lack of border management and securitization. Despite fencing 95 percent of its borders, Pakistan finds itself helpless due to its inadequacy regarding border management cooperation with Afghanistan. Even the Durand Line is deemed useless by the Afghan government, further complicating the process of border securitization by either of the governments. This contention between the two countries has facilitated a safe passage for the militants. However, Swat remains the most vulnerable region as it is easier for the militants to reach and carry out their activities.

Secondly, the evolving demands of the TTP have posed another roadblock in the peace negotiations for the Pakistani government. The TTP initially emerged with the primary aim of establishing Sharia law in Pakistan, owing to the belief that Pakistan got independent as a separate state for that very purpose. However, its demands have changed according to the prevailing circumstances. Apart from sticking to their old demands, the peace negotiations between the state and the TTP are also hindered due to the latter's demand to overturn the merger of Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The TTP has always had bad blood with the tribal elders and killed many of them. The government hoped the tribal elders would support them in governing the region, but it further infuriated the TTP. Furthermore, the arrests of TTP members while the peace negotiations were underway posed another hurdle for the state.

Lastly, the failure of Pakistan's government to negotiate peace with the TTP and to limit terrorist activities in the country has raised concerns among the people of Swat. In May, the two parties agreed to extend their ceasefire agreement indefinitely and vowed to respect it until a concrete peace deal is negotiated. However, the negotiations were obstructed midway when the Pakistani forces arrested and assassinated



influential TTP leaders. The people of Swat view this as the government's incapability to negotiate and act due to which peace in the region has been compromised. Furthermore, despite the state's claims about limiting terror in the country and assuring people of their safety, it has failed to deliver on its promises. The country remains vulnerable to such threats, and thus, the military under Army Chief General Bajwa is criticized for failing to prevent the resurgence of terror outfits and civilian killings. In retrospect, the people of

Swat are terrified and remain so until a favorable peace negotiation is reached between the government and terrorist organizations. Hence, it is highly probable that the people will hold the government responsible for its inability to lead peace processes in the future.

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Afghanistan: The Taliban, women, and how history repeats itself

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Since coming to power in August 2021, the Taliban has reversed the progress on gender equality and women's rights. In the last year, women have once again become the targets of restrictive and indiscriminate rules despite the Taliban's promises that they had moderated their positions on women and girls. It began with an imposition at the end of 2021, where only women whose jobs could not be done by men were allowed to come to work. Later, the Taliban declared that women must cover their faces in public and instructed them to remain in their homes except in cases of necessity. They were also banned from travelling long distances without a male relative. More recently, women have been banned from parks, funfairs, gyms, and public baths. The Taliban also abolished the Ministry of Women's Affairs which removed women from political participation.

However, the biggest hit to women's rights in Afghanistan is the Taliban's ban on education for girls above sixth standard, affecting over 1.1 million girls in Afghanistan. The ban was imposed on 18 September 2021, bringing back instances of Taliban's past rule in the 1990s, to bar girls from school without issuing a formal prohibition. On March 21, 2022, the Taliban promised to reopen all schools, however, an indefinite ban was placed on the decision with no clarity about when these schools will reopen. According to the Taliban, the current education system in the country which was left by the west requires reforms. They stated that a few adjustments need to be made to the curriculum, provision of transportation and the creation of a separate educational system for

Afghan girls need to be made before schools are reopened.

According to a UN Women report: "In practice, restrictions on women's freedom of movement often go beyond what is prescribed in decrees," due to the culture of fear and intimidation associated with the Taliban. Meanwhile, the World Economic Forum's 2022 Global Gender Gap Report ranked Afghanistan 146 out of 146 for women's educational attainment and economic participation and opportunity.

[History repeats itself: Taliban's view of women in the past](#)

Looking back, the Taliban in the 1990s operated along similar lines. The Taliban had brutally imposed social restrictions on women including mandatory burqa coverings, as well as fundamentally and deleteriously, restricting their access to health care, education, and jobs. They also prohibited women from appearing in public spaces without a male relative and restricted their movement in public. Following the fall of the Taliban, the socio-economic status of women gradually improved as their representation was recognised by the previous regime. Women were allowed to participate in politics, media, healthcare, and other spheres as their fundamental rights were secured. However, all the gains made over the last two decades are slowly being reversed by the Taliban, who had initially promised to secure the rights of women.

Unlike in the past: Women take initiative

While the Taliban has violated women's and girls' rights to education, denying them equal opportunity and restricting their ability to move and work, women have peacefully protested these restrictions and policies. Protests have been staged in Kabul, Herat, Wardak, Bamyan, Paktia and other regions. During these demonstrations, women called on the Taliban to ensure girls have access to education and for the creation of jobs and opportunities for them to earn a livelihood. These protests have taken place since the Taliban came to power. Unlike in the past, women have attempted to rally for their rights and have demanded that the Taliban guarantee their rights.

Taliban 2.0 and women: A repeat of the past

Despite several demonstrations being held constantly over the last 15 months, the Taliban has progressively imposed rules and bans hampering the rights of women. While the Taliban has claimed that it would protect women's rights under sharia and not go back to the repressive rule of the past, their recent actions speak otherwise. They claim to protect women's rights under sharia but refuse to specify how women's rights and life in Afghanistan would change. Rather, the Taliban's inclinations show further tightening of cultural restrictions on women and shrinking of socio-economic opportunities for them. Additionally, the challenge for women varies across Afghanistan as the Taliban's rule varies significantly among local Taliban military commanders and shadow district governors. In

some places, brutalities such as whipping women for sex outside of marriage, stoning them to death for certain offences, and punishment for not wearing a burqa continue, while in other regions, the Taliban is seen as more permissive.

The Taliban's behaviour and subsequent policies toward women impacted women's social status and psychological well-being. Women are continued to be treated as lesser humans or as second-class citizens under the Taliban regime in the guise of ensuring a safer environment for them. Along with Afghanistan's patriarchal society, the Taliban's recent decisions on women's rights highlight their efforts to exert ever-increasing control over women's mobility, education and professional choices, access to everyday services and their ability to exercise their fundamental rights.

Publicly, the Taliban claim to have learned from past mistakes and moderated significantly from their earlier extreme policies when it comes to women's rights. However, 15 months into their rule, the Taliban has failed to uphold the rights of women or even display flexibility on certain issues concerning them. Rather, the Taliban has defaulted to a backwards-looking mindset on the rights, roles and futures of women and girls.

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South Caucasia: Prospects for Stable Peace

Athar Zafar

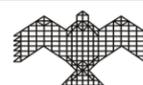
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In mid-September 2022 fighting once again erupted between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the South Caucasus region on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue leaving over 200 dead. The two countries had fought a war in 2020, and with the subsequent ceasefire agreement a gradual move towards stability in the region was expected. Instead, the latest flare-up affected the regional condition and the prospects of regional cooperation. Given international situation, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has the potential to become a major flashpoint by drawing in regional and extra-regional actors. Nevertheless, certain recent but significant developments, aided by external factors, including the unexpected Russian military operations in Ukraine and its

consequences, concerns over energy supply, international economic scenario and quest for resilient transport networks for inter-regional and global commerce, and the successive meetings of the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan indicate possible easing of the tense regional environment in South Caucasia and incremental move towards stability.

South Caucasus a complex region

South Caucasus has been considered as one of the complex ethnic regions of the world with all three countries of the region having population of diverse backgrounds. Since ancient times apart from being a trade corridor, the region has been a zone of frontiers of several yore empires – at times in conflict with each other. The region is



also geopolitically complex. Over the last two centuries, the Nagorno-Karabakh region experienced various transitions. It was ceded by Persia to Tsarist Russia following the Treaty of Gulistan 1813 and the Treaty of Turkmanchai 1828. South Caucasia's land neighbours are Iran, Turkiye and Russia, while on the east it has Caspian Sea and in the west Black Sea. All three neighbouring countries were big empires in the past and held sway over the region in different periods.

Currently, Russia has a military base in Armenia and both are members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Russia has also deployed peacekeepers in parts of Nagorno-Karabakh region. Turkiye has traditionally been supporting Azerbaijan, including militarily. Iran has a large Azeri population and shares borders with both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, Tehran supports Armenia's territorial integrity and sovereignty with which it shares 'friendly and amicable relations.'

The roots of recent instability in South Caucasia can be traced to Tsarist and Soviet geopolitics. The Armenian-majority Nagorno-Karabakh was incorporated as an Autonomous Republic within Azerbaijan in 1923, while the Zangizur area of Azerbaijan became part of Armenia. Later, as the USSR unravelled tensions surfaced and in late 1980s ethnic Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh demanded transfer of the region to Armenian control. In 1991, Nagorno-Karabakh declared independence leading to war with Azerbaijan. The war caused Azerbaijan to lose Nagorno-Karabakh as well as adjacent territories to the Armenian backed forces. Azerbaijan recovered parts of lost territories in the 2020 war.

South Caucasia in changing energy dynamics

Russia has so far been a stable and large supplier of energy to Europe. However, the Russian military operation in Ukraine and the consequent sanctions on Russia have severely impacted regional and international transport and energy networks. Europe's concern about gas supply and maintaining price stability in the energy market has increased. European countries are diversifying their supplies and the South Caucasian region is emerging as an important partner. Europe is securing gas deals on a priority and it is finding Azerbaijan a willing partner. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen visited Baku in July 2022 and met with President Ilham Aliyev. The two sides signed a new MoU on a Strategic Partnership in the Field of Energy. They plan to double the capacity of the Southern Gas Corridor to deliver around 20 billion cubic metres (BCM) of gas to EU annually

by 2027. Further, a ceremony was held in Sofia, Bulgaria on 1 October 2022 to inaugurate the Gas Interconnector Greece-Bulgaria (IGB), which was also attended by Azerbaijan President. The project was termed as 'freedom' from dependency on Russian gas by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

The narrow land strip in South Caucasia provides a critical energy corridor with pipelines transferring energy to European markets. Peace and stability in the region is necessary for unhindered energy production and transportation.

Recent efforts to stabilize Nagorno-Karabakh situation

There have been recent efforts by major and regional powers to bring peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan and contribute towards stability and development in South Caucasia. Seemingly, diversification of energy sources and secured supply are primary reasons for renewed interests of Western countries to work for rapprochement between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

On the side-lines of the United Nations General Assembly, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken hosted both Foreign Minister of Armenia and Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan in a meeting in New York on 19 September 2022. Blinken emphasised the need to prevent further fighting and return to the peace process.

Subsequently, in a significant development, Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan and President Aliyev held direct talks, which was attended by the President of France and the President of the European Council, who had taken this initiative. The talks were held on the side-lines of the first meeting of the European Political Community in Prague on October 6, 2022. Following the talks, the two leaders agreed to allow the EU to send a mission to the common borders of Armenia and Azerbaijan to build confidence.

Besides, on the side-lines in Prague, PM Pashinyan also held bilateral meetings with Turkiye President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The two leaders discussed the process of normalisation of Armenian-Turkish relations and stressed the importance of direct contacts and high-level meetings. Following the meeting, the Turkish President referring to Turkiye's shared but closed borders with Armenia, said that as soon as Armenia and Azerbaijan sign a peace agreement the Turkish borders will be opened. Indicating that Russia continues to be a relevant actor in South Caucasus, President Vladimir Putin

hosted on October 31, 2022 in Sochi PM Pashinyan and President Aliyev in a trilateral format. A statement was adopted by the three leaders emphasizing the importance of active preparations for the signing of a peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan. They also agreed to refrain from the use of force and to discuss and resolve all problematic issues on the basis of mutual recognition of sovereignty, territorial integrity.

After the meeting in Sochi, PM Pashinyan paid a visit to Tehran and held talks with President Ebrahim Raisi on 1 November 2022. Apart from bilateral issues, the two leaders discussed the regional situation. In October, Iran had opened a consulate in southern Armenia city of Kapan to bolster Iran-Armenia relations.

Conclusion

The people of Nagorno-Karabakh have long been impacted by regional and international geopolitics. The conflict has been a barrier hindering regional security, stability and economic development and also impacting cooperation in inter-regional connectivity. Given the international scenario, the stakes in South Caucasia are high for regional and extra-regional players in terms of energy security and connectivity links. Making use of the opportunities presented by geopolitical shifts, both Armenia and Azerbaijan can continuously move towards finalizing a peace agreement and contribute to peace and stability as regional cooperation is the way forward for South Caucasus.

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Africa: An overview and reasons behind persistence of conflicts

Apoorva Sudhakar

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Every year, African countries feature on the list of conflicts to watch out for, or they are among the top ten countries on indices of hunger or displacement. In 2021, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) placed six African countries on its conflict watchlist for 2022. Similarly, for the first time, all countries on the Norwegian Refugee Council's "The world's most neglected displacement crises in 2021" were African with internal displacement mostly driven by conflicts.

The Peace Research Institute Oslo's (PRIO) latest 30-year analysis of conflicts in Africa from 1989 to 2019 reveals that state-based conflicts in Africa reached an all-time high in 2019, along with the presence of non-state actors like the Islamic State. Several conflicts in Africa are also characterised as non-state conflicts, which does not involve governments. Overall, Africa's conflict hotspots include the Lake Chad region, eastern parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the trilateral border between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, and parts of Cameroon.

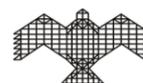
Conflicts in Africa: An overview

Conflicts in Africa can broadly be categorised as intrastate, bilateral, and regional conflicts.

However, understanding African conflicts through its causes brings forth the following categories:

First, ethnic conflicts. Compared to the post-independence conflicts in Africa driven by strong ethnic loyalties, ethnicity as a factor today seems to have a limited role with the emergence of new threats. However, several intrastate conflicts continue to be characterised by ethnic differences and strong loyalties to causes – political, economic or otherwise – that uphold these differences. For example, in Ethiopia, beyond the state-based conflict in Tigray, there are simultaneous conflicts fuelled by differences between ethnic groups like the Tigrayans, Oromos and the Amharas. Similarly, in Sudan, conflict over resources is common between the Arab Rizeigat and African Masalit tribes. These characteristics can also be identified across the continent, including towards western Africa, where conflict between Hausa farmers and Fulani nomads are common.

Second, resource-based or environmental conflicts. Among conflict hotspots in Africa, the Sahel region, a belt extending from west to north-central Africa, is emerging as a hotbed for conflict over resources. The region has witnessed increasingly frequent instances of conflict between agricultural and pastoralist



communities. The Africa Center for Strategic Studies quotes ACLED data which outlines that farmer-herder violence has claimed 15,000 lives from 2010 to 2021. The competition for resources, including land, water and pasture, is often exacerbated by ethnic, religious or political differences.

Third, non-traditional security threats. New threats to Africa's peace and stability include climate change and related disasters, migration and displacement, food insecurity and famines, and political upheavals. Unlike armed conflicts that remain geographically limited, these threats have a transnational impact. Today, in Africa, non-traditional security issues are taking precedence over armed conflict as the casualties among humans and the environment are becoming more evident.

Reasons why conflicts continue

First, the colonial past and the problem of outliers. Colonial powers introduced new borders to African countries that ignored ethnic and religious composition of regions. Colonialism replaced the traditional clan-based, tribal or lineage systems with Western governance systems in countries with haphazard borders. In most cases, several ethnic groups were partitioned into different colonial regions, thereby restricting their movement along the borders. The federal governing authorities failed to address the concerns of these peripheral groups, thus leading to deep rooted differences. Some contemporary conflicts have their roots in post-independence interstate conflicts over these territories divided by colonial powers.

Second, political instabilities and weak governance. Post-independence Africa witnessed an unprecedented rise of military leaders. On the one hand, democratic revolutions gained momentum in the 1990s; several leaders continued to stay in power for decades by amending constitutions and keeping institutions like judiciary and media under their control. On the other hand, despite the introduction of democracies, African leaders continue to manipulate ethnic and religious differences to nurture their vote banks. Therefore, a lack of checks and balances led to the persistence of

conflicts. The shaky foundations of democracy have thus led to political upheavals in parts of Africa, especially in the west where the region witnessed a series of coups and attempted coups in recent years.

Third, exploitation by non-state actors. Armed groups and other non-state actors like terrorist organisations, including the Islamic State and al Shabaab, have exploited ethnic differences and expanded their base in parts of Africa. In central and west Africa, for instance, farmer and herder allegedly align themselves with armed groups who are often affiliated to terrorist groups. Meanwhile, some groups like al Shabaab are known to perform state functions like collection of taxes and addressing grievances of civilian populations. This, in turn, leads to a conflict between civilian groups, as well as between state and non-state actors.

Fourth, regional and international failures. Regional organisations like the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States have often attempted to address the above-mentioned conflicts, securing some success. However, continuation or resurgence of the same indicate a need for enhanced and inclusive mechanisms. Similarly, Africa has often been sidelined on international forums including the United Nations. African countries are often caught between choosing between the power play between the West and non-Western powers like China or Russia. Therefore, it is difficult for Africa to bring forth its concerns.

Therefore, unlike the popular debate which pins colonialism as the sole cause for the existing conflicts in Africa, the dynamics of conflicts in the continent are more complex and delicate today. To address these issues, Africa needs to strengthen its institutions, hold its leaders accountable and acknowledge the existence of new-age threats, instead of resorting to the usual tactics of exploiting existing faultlines.

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Africa: The Wagner Group, exploitation of conflicts and increased dependency on Russia

Devjyoti Saha

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In the 2019 Russia-Africa Summit in Sochi, Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed his desire to reinstate Russia's Cold-War era influence in the African continent, which has waned over the years. Russia, a late entrant into the 21st Century Scramble for Africa, with the United States and China already involved in a geopolitical tug-of-war, has employed the idea of hybrid warfare involving mercenaries of the Wagner Group backed by an intense disinformation campaign by the St. Petersburg based Internet Research Agency (IRA) to turn its foreign policy ambitions in Africa into reality.

Who are the "Shadow Warriors" of the Wagner Group?

The present-day Wagner Group originated from the now-defunct Slavonic Corps deployed in the Syrian conflict in 2013. The failure of the Slavonic Group mercenaries in Syria and its monumental defeat in the combat mission in Deir-al-Zour led to the disbandment of the Private Security Company (PSC).

Dmitry Utkin founded the Wagner Group in 2014. Utkin, a GRU veteran and a member of the now-disbanded Slavonic Corps, has experience working in state and non-state security forces. That experience and the old linkages with the Russian special combat unit allowed him to establish a covert organization with the state's strong support.

The Russian Constitution clearly states all matters pertaining to defence and security are strictly under the ambit of the State. But on the ground, the oligarchs have close links with the State. Oligarchs like Yevgeny Prigozhin, infamously known as "Putin's Chef", changed his fortunes from a simple caterer to becoming the chief financier and manager of the Wagner Group and the troll network IRA by exploiting his links with the Kremlin and his bonhomie with Putin.

Wagner Group's Involvement in Africa's conflicts

The Wagner Group started its covert mission in Africa, led and monitored by Prigozhin. Chronologically, its missions are as follows:

- In 2017, the Group was involved in quelling the local uprisings against Sudan's dictator Omar al-Bashir.
- In 2018, the Group got involved with the weak government of President Faustin-

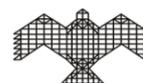
Archange Touadera of the Central African Republic (CAR) to ensure that Touadera stayed in power by eliminating threats emerging from the civil society and local militias.

- In 2019, Russia cleverly employed the Group in the Libyan conflict to strengthen its position in the Mediterranean. The Wagner Group supported the local warlord Khalifa Haftar and his forces in the onslaught on Tripoli.
- In 2019, Mozambique's President hired the Wagner Group to assist the local forces in counterinsurgency operations.
- In 2021, the Group carried its latest deployment in Mali, a country that has been a victim of Islamic terror organizations like Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islamwa al-Musalmin (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (IS-GS). The 2022 French decision to withdraw France's counter-terrorism forces deployed in Mali since 2013, has left the country and its people at the mercy of the mercenaries.

Wagner's four-tiered approach towards creating African dependencies

First, in the 2019 Summit, Russia initiated a narrative where the Kremlin portrayed Russia as Africa's liberator from the neo-colonial West, which is creating African dependencies and filling their treasuries by taking undue advantage of the African countries. Reiterating its historical position against colonization and racism, Russia tried to project itself as a partner and proposed a mutually beneficial partnership between Africa and the Kremlin. Since then, Prigozhin's widespread trolling agencies initiated a disinformation campaign falsely projecting Western countries like the French involvement in the Sahel region as a neo-colonial practice. Through these disinformation campaigns, Prigozhin created a support base for the entry of Russian mercenaries by propping up false images of locals waving Russian flags and booing exiting French forces as they did in the case of Mali. The disinformation campaign is highly organized, and in 2019 Facebook closed around 300 such sites that were targeting African countries.

Second, before sending mercenaries in large numbers, Prigozhin created a cycle of dependency in African countries on Russian military aid. It



started with covert political support through political advisors and a few mercenaries in the form of private security guards for the head of the state. Around 170 political advisors were sent to the Central African Republic, whose main motive was to gain insights into the inner functioning of the political environment and conduct phony election monitoring to declare the elections and elected leader as the legitimate head of state. Through political support, the advisors gradually established a rapport and gained mutually beneficial influence for both Wagner and Kremlin. The influence over the head of state led to deepening defence engagements with the Russian State and permission to the Wagner Group to send their forces.

Third, the mercenaries entered the countries under the garb of fighting insurgency and local militias, but in reality, they became private security guards of autocratic leaders. From conflict resolution, their main aim converted into conflict prolongation by suppressing civil society uprisings, carrying out blatant human rights violations and protecting the state's supremacy at all costs. The disinformation campaign continued its attempts to defend the actions of the mercenaries by targeting the legitimacy of the protests and portraying victims of human rights abuses as insurgents and terrorists. In the process, the mercenaries further fueled the state-society conflict, making the leaders dependent on the Wagner Group to provide security and protect them from the wrath of the members of society.

Fourth, Prigozhin, a notorious opportunist, taking advantage of this dependency, sought exclusive mining rights over oil fields and minerals in these resource-rich African countries. On the one hand, the Wagner Group provides private security to the leaders. On the other hand, Prigozhin's affiliate corporations, Lobaye Invest and Meroe Gold, drain these countries of their resources. Moreover, the mercenaries who entered the countries to protect the locals from decades of violence are now inflicting violence on the civilians to secure the mines located in the civilian areas and indigenous forestlands for Prigozhin's mining projects. As the Wagner Group is a non-state organization, it is a self-financed organization, and these mines are a source of

long-term revenue. Hence, now the main motive of the mercenaries is to let the conflict continue so that, under the pretext of conflict resolution, they can continue their private economic interests. At the same time, the Kremlin enjoys deeper military engagements and hefty weapon contracts from African countries.

[Kremlin-Wagner's symbiotic relationship to reassert Russian dominance in Africa](#)

The new Russian foreign policy approach of hybrid warfare in Africa is primarily based on its learning from the failures and shortcomings of the USSR's foreign policy initiatives in Africa. USSR failed to maintain its once-dominant position in the continent due to unstable political regimes in African countries that changed alliances from USSR to China or the US and domestic economic decline that did not allow the State to fulfil the commitments to their African partners. Hence, Putin has learned from history that State cannot manage it all, especially when Russia that does not have deep pockets like China and the US. Moreover, Russia has already been involved in constant warfare with Ukraine since the 2014 Crimean crisis and the present all-out war; the Kremlin cannot afford to lose its soldiers in other countries' battles. Hence, PSC, like the Wagner Group, is the best alternative as mercenaries are banned in Russia, so the Kremlin does not have to maintain a book of lives lost or keep track of their activities. That makes it easy for the Russian state to deny human rights abuses, disinformation campaigns and other notorious activities carried out by Prigozhin's companies, while at the same time maintaining its covert influence on the African countries. By influencing the national leaders to deepen their defence and military engagements with the Kremlin, Russian oligarch Prigozhin gets the State's backing to exploit the conflict zones for his private commercial interests freely.

Hence, the mutually beneficial relationship between the State and the oligarch pushes Africa towards a new era of Russian dependency.

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Africa: End of Operation Barkhane, and future implications for France and Sahel

Poulomi Mondal

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On 9 November, French President Emmanuel Macron announced the official end of Operation Barkhane in his keynote speech during his trip to the Toulon naval base where he presented a New National Strategic Review (RNS).

Referring to the recent backlashes against the European and mainly French forces in the Sahel region, he said that the decision was a “consequence of what we have experienced’ in recent months and there would be a strategy overhaul to be worked with the African counterparts within the next six months. This announcement marked the end of a counter-terrorism operation that began in January 2013 in Mali with the launch of Operation Serval, later renamed as Barkhane. This also sees the end of a transition withdrawal of the French troops from Mali which began in August 2021.

Four major factors behind the termination

First, breakdown of Franco-Malian relations. Operation Barkhane became the longest French overseas military operation after the Algerian war. It had up to 5,500 soldiers deployed in Sahel-Saharan zone of Africa (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Mauritania). Operation Barkhane and the Takuba Taskforce jointly worked on local counterterrorism in Mali’s Gao, Timbuktu, Kidal, Gossi, Menaka and Ansongo. In August 2021, the French military bases were evacuated in Kidal, Tessalit and Timbuktu following Mali’s allegations against alleged French interference in the 2021 military coup. The International Strategic Research Institute of Military School says disinformation campaigns on social media amplified these alleged involvements and led to the breakdown of Franco-Malian relations.

Second, failure of counter-terrorism efforts. The beginning of Operation Serval and later Barkhane saw significant success in terms of their objectives in ousting Islamic militants from Northern Mali and liberation of nearly half of the country which had been overrun by extremists in a few months. The tactical success of the operation was evident in the killings of high-profile extremist leaders such as Abdel Malek Droukdel and Bah Ag Moussa; this was later overshadowed by France’s irrefutable failures to curb extremism in Mali after 2014. In addition to the failures, the lack of local support for the presence of a former colonial power in the country led to widening of the rift

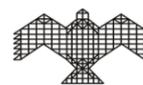
between France and the Sahel countries which feel these foreign military operations are a part of neo-colonial mindsets with no considerable results.

Third, domestic instability in the region. During the announcement of the termination, President Macron mentions the perpetuating domestic-political instability in the region. In case of Mali, the country saw a military coup in 2020 and 2021 and suffers from a lack of stable governance as well as the resource crisis akin to all Sahel nations. Similarly, Chad is facing violent political protests by the opposition party leaving heavy civilian casualties, meanwhile Burkina Faso stands amidst its second coup in two years with a clear lack of military leadership resulting in failure of having a transitional government for national stability.

Fourth, the Russian factor. The presence of Russian mercenaries from Wagner group to fill the growing dissatisfaction against the European and the UN operations in the region, brings geopolitics at the helm of the issue. These mercenaries have also been linked with several attacks on civilians in areas under strong Islamist control. According to data by the NGO Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), as many as 456 civilians were killed in nine incidents surrounding the Wagner group and the Malian authorities between January to April 2022. The investigations for the Moura massacre also reveal the alleged involvement of the Group killing around 380 people in a four-day period. In 2021, Russian foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov publicly acknowledged the presence of the Wagner group for commercial purposes in Mali, but the group seemed to be called in for “missed missions” with the Malian soldiers after striking a deal with the new military rulers.

What are the implications for Sahel?

Looking at the case study of Afghanistan as a country where withdrawal of dated military operations led to the immediate takeover by Taliban, similar concerns of heightened extremist resurgences lies ahead for the Sahel region. The Sahel is vulnerable to decades of activities of terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda, ISIS and al Shabaab alongside several local and splinter terrorist organizations in several regions. The International Crisis Group further revealed that



violence linked with groups like Jama'at Nasr al-Islam Muslimim (JNIM) and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) rose 70 per cent in 2021 as compared to 2020, emphasising on the "hegemonic presence" of JNIM in many central and northern parts of Mali. Therefore, the decrease in military pressure comes as the militancy is on the rise in Mali and shows the highest probability of surge after the withdrawal, threatening the security of the entire region. Additionally, the targeted attacks on Islamic establishments by mercenaries might further aggravate the Islamic militancy in these countries.

What are the implications for France?

Firstly, while the end of the operation comes with the complete withdrawal of forces from Mali, 3,000 soldiers are to be stationed at Chad and Niger. Additionally, in recent times, France seems to be shifting its counter-terrorism efforts to Western African countries like the presence of permanent personnel stationed in Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal. France has a solid and long-standing presence in the West African coast to fight against al-Qaeda or Islamic State, which can pave the way for France to extend its monitoring capabilities to the larger region.

Secondly, the withdrawal of French forces might also lead to the downsizing of a number of personnel in the Takuba taskforce pioneered by the European nations jointly for combating local terrorism, but clearly failing to achieve any substantial results. This can leave a larger void for

non-state actors and reduce accountability of the alleged involvement of the Russian mercenaries which can aggravate the already worsening security condition of the region.

Thirdly, the overhaul, as promised by the Macron can be in the form of G5 Sahel Joint Force. A regional counter-terrorism task force comprised of military personnel from the Sahelian states as well as the French military to involve all the stakeholders and attempt to gain local legitimacy for an effective counter-terrorism operation.

Failure of France in Mali and largely in Sahel is due to a combination of factors including misunderstanding of local power dynamic, operational failures leading to inefficiency and various political mistakes. Moreover, it is largely the overwhelmingly militarized approach of France towards the region due to assumption of terrorism solely to be the root cause of instability, and not accounting for governance failures or the resource scarcity which often are the reasons of failing democratization of the region. Therefore, the proposed overhaul of the counter-terrorism plans of France needs to take in account the ground realities and be inclusive of the regional players for effective governance and facilitator of growth and security in the region.

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Africa: Ethiopia-Tigray ceasefire, and the complex roadmap for peace

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On 2 November, the Ethiopian government, and Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) agreed to a permanent ceasefire ending two years of conflict that left half a million people dead, thousands displaced and nearly nine million in urgent need of humanitarian aid. The peace talks were brokered by the African Union under mediation of former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo and former Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta in South Africa.

On 13 November, military leaders from Ethiopia and the Tigray region held another meeting in Nairobi, where they agreed to unhindered

humanitarian access to the region and to form a joint disarmament committee.

The AU Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat said the deal is a "unique opportunity towards the restoration of peace." Obasanjo said that both the parties have agreed on an "orderly, smooth and coordinated disarmament" along with "restoration of law and order," "unilateral access to humanitarian supplies," and "restoration of services." Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said: "The commitment to peace remains steadfast and our commitment to collaborating for the implementation of the agreement is

equally strong. The TPLF said: “Ultimately, the fact that we have reached a point where we have now signed an agreement speaks volumes about the readiness on the part of the two sides to lay the past behind them to chart a new path of peace.” The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres welcomed the agreement, and his spokesperson said: “It is very much a welcome first step, which we hope can start to bring some solace to the millions of Ethiopian civilians that have really suffered during the conflict.” The US Department of State spokesperson said: “The African Union’s announcement of the signing of a cessation of hostilities between the government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front represents an important step towards peace.”

Four takeaways of the ceasefire agreement

The following are the major takeaways of the ceasefire agreement:

First, a permanent cessation of hostilities. Following the agreement, the Ethiopian government and the TPLF agreed to a permanent cessation of hostilities, including acts of violence, airstrikes, obstruction, “hostile propaganda, rhetoric and hate speech.” In addition, both the parties agreed not to intrigue with any external forces hostile to either of the parties as well as agreed on the protection of civilians who have been affected by the violence.

Second, Disarmament. Both the parties agreed on a single defence force for Ethiopia and on TPLF entering a disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programme. Besides, TPLF has agreed to a full disarmament, including light weapons within 30 days. In addition, Ethiopian forces will return to their former military base in Mekelle, Tigray regional capital.

Third, restoration of federal authority and political inclusion of Tigray. Based on the agreement, a new interim administration will be appointed for Tigray until elections after both sides agree on the restoration of Ethiopia’s federal government in Tigray. TPLF also committed to “cease all attempts of bringing an unconstitutional change of government.” Meanwhile, the Ethiopian government has agreed to an inclusive representation of Tigrayans at the centre addressing the fundamental issue of ethnic marginalisation.

Four, restoration of humanitarian aid and services. Since the conflict began in November 2021, the Tigray region was deprived of basic communication and essential services. Besides, nearly 5 million people were at the brink of famine after food and humanitarian aid to the region were constantly blocked.

Now, both sides have agreed to abide by international humanitarian law. The federal government has committed to work with humanitarian agencies to allow unhindered access to aid in Tigray. The government has also agreed to facilitate restoration of essential services and the return and repatriation of the displaced.

What does the ceasefire mean?

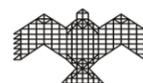
The sudden ceasefire is a significant achievement, a hope to end the two-year deadly conflict. The successful peace deal is an achievement for the African Union and its objective of ‘African solution to African problems.’ However, achieving a permanent ceasefire in Tigray won't be easy.

The conflict is rooted in a long-standing ethnopolitical rift, violent regime change, failed truce, and a large humanitarian crisis which makes the ceasefire agreement seem increasingly volatile. The ceasefire was reached on the sidelines of intense pressure by Ethiopian forces and Eritrean forces on TPLF and the international community on the Ethiopian government. Besides, the uncertainty over unaddressed issues and the critical question of how and when the key provisions of the agreement would be implemented on the ground remain unclear.

The agreement makes no explicit mention of Eritreans or forces from Ethiopia's neighbourhood that have fought alongside the Ethiopian army. Though the agreement states that the Ethiopian army will protect the country from “foreign incursion,” many are skeptical about whether Eritrea, TPLF’s sworn enemy, would abide. In addition, political issues including territorial disputes between Tigray and neighbouring Amhara region remain unresolved. Lack of trust between the warring parties is challenging. Furthermore, uncertainty persists over the AU’s lack of effective mechanisms to oversee and enforce the peace process. The question of implementation of key provisions in the deal including Tigray’s interim administration, elections, distribution of humanitarian aid and resumption of blocked services remain unresolved. In sum, the agreement is a delicate opportunity to consolidate a permanent ceasefire and long-term stability in Ethiopia, though the initial steps appear complex.

*(*Parts of this commentary were previously published in an earlier Conflict Weekly issue)*

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Africa: A war and truce between Ethiopia and Tigray

S Shaji

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Government of Ethiopia and Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the dissident group from Tigray, a northern state in Ethiopia in the Horn of Africa, signed a Peace Agreement on 2 November 2022, which was brokered by the African Union (AU). Accordingly, both the sides agreed for the permanent cessation of hostilities. The Agreement, which was signed on November 2nd in Pretoria, South Africa, is considered to be a significant step in ending the civil war which broke out in 2020. In fact, there has been huge criticism from various quarters from across the world that there is significant digression from the path of democracy in Ethiopia in recent times, a State which was applauded for its democratic turn under the leadership Abiy Ahmed, a few years ago. Abiy Ahmed, the Ethiopian President, once a favorite political figure in the Western discourses, began to face confrontation for his role in the Tigray civil war which killed and displaced thousands.

From various news reports, it is understood that the agreement has put forth various clauses which are promising but seem overambitious. For instance, the deal suggests that TPLF would agree to the previous constitutional order and would disarm itself and would also provide adequate representation to Tigrayan population in employment and education. In other words, the deal envisions the restoration of Ethiopian government's constitutional authority in Tigray region. In addition, the deal also includes provisions for access to Tigrayans to obtain civilian services, which were denied to them in the last two years, mainly through the blockade that the Ethiopian government had imposed on the people from the region. It is also reported that 13 million people would require humanitarian assistance, most notably in terms of food and medicine supply. It is further agreed that the federal government would facilitate the return of several thousand displaced families. In addition, the implementation of the deal is to be monitored by a group of experts (around 10), appointed by AU. Of course, the Government of Eritrea is not party to the deal though they have ongoing feuds with TPLF. The issues in Western Tigray which remain unresolved are also not covered in the deal. The truce also speaks about introducing a 'Comprehensive National Transitional Justice Policy' to deal with justice and accountability issues. In addition, the Federal Government of Ethiopia has promised to remove the tag linked to TPLF as a terrorist organization.

If one looks at the background of violence in Ethiopia, like many other conflicts in Africa, it is closely linked to historical and ethnic fault lines and ethnic nationalism. On the ethnic front, Oromos and Amharas constitute nearly 60 per cent of the Ethiopian population whereas Tigrayans constitute less than 10 per cent of the population. At certain points in the past, Tigrayan had substantial presence in the government, bureaucracy and so on, under the notion of ethnic federalism that came into existence since 1991. The capture of power by the majority group - Oromos and Amharas, in Ethiopian politics substantially reduced the power and representation of Tigray groups, which led to the emergence of Tigrayan ethnic nationalism which took a violent turn in 2020. In 2020, Tigray regional elections led to the war, with Abiy Ahmed led Ethiopian Government questioning the validity of electoral processes in Tigray region. In the said election, according to the electoral officials, TPLF won more than 98 per cent votes. This was the time when Abiy Ahmed refused to hold general elections in the country citing Covid-19 related restrictions. Thus, the conflict over the validity and the timings of the elections led to the Ethiopian troops, along with Amhara militia attacking the Tigray region in the western part of Tigray while Eritrean troops occupied the northern region.

Africa observers point out certain problems in the peace deal. For instance, the deal has not included the Eritrean Government, which is also a party to the conflict, though certain clauses indirectly imply dealing with forces inimical to both parties involved in the deal (the Ethiopian government and TPLF). Second, the deal does not include the Government of Tigray, but only the TPLF. Third, the deal does not talk about a broad monitoring, verification, and compliance mechanism to supervise the implementation of the deal. The mechanism, envisaged in the deal, is restricted to a committee of just 10 eminent persons, appointed by AU and reports to the latter, which is headed by Olesegun Obasanjo, the former Nigerian President. In other words, international actors such as the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (a prominent aid partner) are completely overlooked in this connection. Similarly, justice and accountability mechanisms are weak; a broad form in terms of a comprehensive transitional justice policy at national level is proposed which is not mandated

to be supervised by prominent international human rights organizations. Of late, it is also reported that Tigrayans are divided on the effectiveness of the peace deal as a particular section consider the deal a surrender while the others consider it as a signal that Abiy Ahmed would return to his peaceful ways (of pre-2020). If the Guerrilla warfare continues in the region even after the truce, it can weaken the perceived peace dividend. Several thousands of people in Tigray were subjected to unprecedented violence to the extent that their very survival itself has been at stake. Therefore, as a way out, the truce has been agreed upon. From Ethiopian standpoint, it requires the support of the West

and wants to avoid the interventions of outside parties in the internal conflicts of the country. Only time can tell whether the deal is genuine or an act to deal with the concerned parties' immediate predicaments vis-à-vis the war. However, one can emphatically assume that inclusive policies and genuine federalism that addresses the concerns of various ethnic groups is the route to resolve conflicts in a multi-ethnic State like Ethiopia in the long run.

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Europe: Ukraine War and the Nordic

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The security interests of the Nordic countries have revolved around their national identity, social welfare, and public opinion since the cold war. The principle of non-alignment and neutrality being the centre of the Nordic countries began to slide when Russia annexed Crimea. Despite Sweden and Finland being involved in the NATO exercises as partners, attaining permanent membership remained a question of sovereignty amongst the public until the Ukraine war. Russia's growing geopolitical aspirations in Europe have altered the security environment of Europe, especially the Nordic countries to join NATO. The commentary will look into the geographic positioning of the Nordic and bring out the altering Security, social, and economic scenarios due to the Ukraine war in Nordic countries.

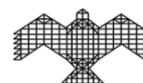
[Geostrategic position of the Nordic in favour of NATO](#)

Russia's plan to prevent the expansion of NATO forfeited with Sweden and Finland's decision to join NATO. Although it has still a hold over Ukraine in eastern Europe, escalating the security threat to the Nordic is trouble for Russia, especially when NATO gets access to the Arctic. In the future, if tensions build between NATO and Russia, it is viable for Russia to send its Northern naval fleet through the Finnish-Sweden Border around the shores of Bodo which extends to 70 to 90 kilometres, however, when Finland and Sweden gain NATO membership the option is closed. Finland which shares 1,340 kilometres border with Russia has a strategic depth to proceed to Murmansk, and facilitate a naval base at Barents and White Sea. This region holds more

than half of Russia's ballistic missile submarines, and upon the membership, Russia's strategic position in the North Atlantic may no longer hold strong and would require more troops to protect the flank. While Sweden and Finland belong in the subarctic, the Baltic Sea will be the next contested area with the border shared by a majority of the European countries from North to the south of the Baltic Sea, whereas Russia holds the east end at the St. Petersburg port. Apart from Sweden and Finland, Denmark offers strategic entry to the Arctic located in the North Atlantic. The strategic location of the Baltic Sea and the Arctic makes the Nordic region significant for NATO.

[What does the war mean for the Nordic?](#)

First, the rapid militarization of the Nordic. In the face of EU security policy and defence, the Nordic Policymakers have always focused on ensuring that they should not become "militarised" and rather opt for "peaceful" solutions. On the other side, while the debate always existed since the 1990s over its institutional choices and Nordic balance questioning its neutral stance, the Nordic has maintained a secret military alliance with NATO. At present, while Sweden maintains a straight line, Finland has increased its defence spending by exceeding two per cent of the GDP over two decades, and Denmark voted to join the EU's common defence policy to speed the process. In terms of combined military expenditures, Sweden, Finland, along with the Baltic states have increased from USD 10 to 15 billion in 2021 especially in the Baltic region in terms of naval ships, maritime surface technology, satellites, and



cybersecurity. Therefore, with the Ukraine war, raising the security threat for the Nordic countries, the militarization trajectory is expected to ramp up.

Second, energy and economic independence. In the Nordic, Denmark, and Finland are most dependent on Russian fossil fuel, but in Europe, the Nordic marks the least dependency in the energy mix. The likely impact on energy is expected from the high energy prices due to Europe's open market. In terms of economy, except Finland due to geographic location, none of the Nordic countries are heavily dependent on Russia or Ukraine. The economic fallout could be due to supply chain challenges, and high food prices which are adding to inflation. This could be worse if the inflation continues to increase and government underperforms to protect the consumers, which is likely until the prices surge. Another hit factor for Nordic economies would be increased military spending and inbound refugees.

Third, shift in public discontent. In the Nordic countries which are well-known for their high tax, social-welfare schemes, and happiness index, militarising is perceived as a negative effect on their lifestyles. When Sweden and Finland submitted their applications to join NATO, the public and youth reacted with protests in small groups against the decision. The first survey was

conducted in 2013 when only 17 per cent of Swedes were in favour of Sweden joining NATO, but after the Crimean annexation, the share increased to 30 per cent. Similar to the militarization process, the opinion amongst the public also slowly changed with Russian aggression breaking away from Nordic neutrality. When the same was held in early 2022, 34 per cent favoured, and when they were asked if Sweden should join if Finland joins, the proportion shifted to 59 per cent and only 17 per cent opposed the membership. A first-time majority indicated a slow death to Sweden's neutrality and non-alignment concord.

The ongoing Ukraine war does not promise a near end but questions the future state of war, military capacities, economic fallouts, and geopolitical scenarios. Finland and Denmark have a higher possibility to face a setback geographically and economically which can be met with increased securitization in the border area and re-routing the trade lines. For the Nordic region, the security landscape is about to take different dimensions with NATO's expansion, and the increasing presence of the US, Russia, and China in the Arctic, making it the next big power conflict zone.

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Latin America: Four implications of War in Ukraine

Sruthi Sadhasivam

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The Ukraine war has had drastic ramifications across the globe, but its impact has been minimal in South America. The Ukraine-Russia war is not the sole cause but a maximizer of Latin America's irregular migration crisis. These states' health security has been threatened due to the Ukraine refugee influx. Further, due to distant ties between Latin American states and Europe, the former, although rich in energy resources, have not profited from rising oil prices amidst the war.

[Discordance within Latin America over the Ukraine war](#)

Moderate condemnation of the war by Latin American countries might be the result of the growing influence of Russia in the region. Nonetheless, countries like Argentina, Columbia, and Chile overtly condemned Russian actions. Although Argentina disapproved of Russia's

invasion, the country, in the initial stages of the war, reached out to Russia to end its economic dependence on the US. Moreover, Russia has been highly supportive of the dictatorial regimes of Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Brazil.

Although Mexico refrained from imposing sanctions and chose to remain neutral following its Estrada doctrine, it denounced Russia's invasion. It called for the resolution of the conflict and the commencement of humanitarian aid. Furthermore, Mexico had voted in favour of Russian withdrawal from Ukraine and criticized European nations for extending weapons to Ukraine.

Most Latin American countries' prime trade partners are Russia and China. Thereby, their castigation of war can be construed as token

criticisms. Their close relationship with Russia and China in terms of trade, has greatly altered the political and economic dynamics in the region.

Is Latin America affected by the Butterfly Effect?

The butterfly effect, a subset of chaos theory, refers to the phenomenon whereby changes in initial conditions can instigate unpredictable ramifications in the future. This theory holds weight in the case of Latin America, as the war has substantially influenced the latter's tourism, trade, energy sector and food security. The ongoing war has positive and negative impacts in the region, with uneven impact across the states. The oil and food-exporting countries are likely to profit from the war, while there will be no major material benefits for other South American countries.

Firstly, inflation in Latin American countries such as Costa Rica, Brazil and Paraguay was partly caused by rising food and energy prices in 2021; these factors that have been intensified due to the war and continue to play a considerable role in stimulating inflationary tendencies in Latin America.

The war impacted tourism industries of countries like Cuba, Dominican Republic and Mexico, that hosted thousands of Russians and Ukrainians during the war, and many were repatriated to their home countries due to sanctions imposed by the west on Russia and vice versa. Following the war, several European countries and the US barred Russian flights and closed their airspace to Russia and the latter retaliated back similarly. Thereby, Russian aviation industries severed their operations with western airlines. The Russian tourists were forced to flee due to the currency devaluation; the Swift system-induced sanctions also caused financial difficulties. Moreover, US and Spain travel companies like Sabre and Amadeus terminated their agreements with Russia's Aeroflot, hindering the latter from selling airline tickets. Due to the closure of western airspaces, Russian flights had to take longer routes to reach Latin America making the travel hectic and pricey, further discouraging travellers.

However, Latin American countries are certainly benefiting from rising food grain prices amidst the war. For instance, Argentina is a major producer of soybean, wheat, and sunflower oil, products that are in scant supply due to war. At the same time, not all Latin American countries are benefiting from rising prices. For instance, countries like Chile export wooden articles, chemicals and copper and have not reaped any additional profits due to rising prices.

Although the EU has expressed firm commitment to finalizing the Mercosur deal with Latin American states, the progress has been slow. For instance, the trade negotiations with New Zealand, Chile, and Mexico had been finalized but the Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) were not signed. Further European countries like France have had reservations about conducting trade with countries like Brazil over the deforestation in the Amazon rainforest.

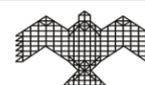
Is Latin America profiting from rising oil prices?

Venezuela, Brazil, and Mexico are major oil-producing countries in Latin America. Venezuela and Brazil have close relations with Russia and are majorly exporting only agricultural products to Europe. In the wake of the Ukraine crisis, the US had eased sanctions imposed on Venezuela to negotiate energy deals with the latter. Of all Latin American countries, Mexico's oil exports have expanded considerably, the US being the chief importer of Mexican oil.

According to the customs data, 26% of US oil is imported from Mexico and the US has plans to import oil from Venezuela as well. On the one hand, to offset Russian oil supply, the U.S has been importing oil from Latin America and on the other hand, it has been exporting it to European countries. The United States decided to provide about 180 million barrels of oil from the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve to offset Europe's oil shortage. The UK imported the highest volume of US crude oil. Thereby, whether the Latin American countries profited from rising oil prices is questionable.

Moreover, refined petroleum was only the 15th most exported product in Argentina, indicating the country's prioritization of other products for exports. Additionally, Petroleum only accounts for about 0.1% of the total oil reserves in the world. Venezuela might have the largest oil reserves in the world, but the major oil suppliers are the US, Russia and Saudi Arabia. European countries thereby import oil from the latter states and import agri-products from former countries.

Furthermore, The EU has been prolonging in finalizing free trade agreements with Mercosur because of Brazil's disregard for environmental concerns. The trade between Argentina and the EU have also been affected due to past disputes over export of biodiesel. Recently, the EU had expressed its interest in reaching an energy memorandum of understanding with Argentina, but given that this idea was just tabled, it will take some time before it actually materializes. Due to issues between Europe and Latin American countries, the latter has been unable to export



their commodities to the European States. Therefore, the US

has been profiting to some extent by assisting countries in meeting their exigencies.

Given that major oil-producing countries like Mexico and Venezuela have remained neutral and have openly supported Russian aggression over Ukraine, there lies a minimal scope for direct oil trade between Europe and Latin America.

An aggravated irregular migration crisis

It would be fallacious to claim that the Ukraine war was the prime cause of the irregular migration crisis in Latin America. However, it's pertinent to note that the war fueled the crisis to another level.

More than 5 million refugees have fled Ukraine in search of safe abodes to reside. Although, a sizeable number of people sought to seek asylum in their neighbouring European states, thousands of Ukrainian refugees fled to Mexico in order to reach the US. Albeit committing to accommodate 100,000 Ukraine refugees, the US has been sending away Ukrainians by invoking its title 42 policy, a framework that allows US to prevent entry by citing threats to health security. Thereby, these refugees are stranded in Mexico along with other migrants from Haiti, Guatemala, Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Honduras who have fled their countries due to internal turmoil such as a widespread corruption, unemployment, poor governance, lack of health facilities and so on. In the absence of means for legal entry to the US, these nationals have been taking to unlawful means to cross the US-Mexico border adding to the already existing irregular migration crisis grappling Latin America.

The US had formulated the Humanitarian Parole program or Uniting for Ukraine program that mandates that Ukraine refugees be completely vaccinated and must have a sponsor to support them in the US. This means those who fail to meet these requisites would have to return back, otherwise get stranded in Mexico looking for

other alternatives, mostly unlawful ways to enter US with the exhaustion of all legal mechanisms. More than the burden of Ukraine refugee influx, the US's stagnant immigration administration in processing asylum applications coupled with its contentious 'Remain in Mexico' policy has adverse ramifications on illegal migration trends in Latin America.

Aggravated Economic and Health insecurity

The increasing number of refugees migrating to Mexico and other Caribbean regions to reach the USA can further aggravate the Covid cases in a financially fragile environment with poor health infrastructure. Given the poor political and economic governance in Latin American states, the latter will not be able to handle new entrants like Ukraine refugees and the presence of the latter increases the possibility of speedy spread of covid virus across a region, that lacks ample medical resources.

The populace in numerous states in the region has not yet taken even the first jab of the covid vaccination. Countries like Guatemala are suffering from serious problems of vaccine hesitancy, lack of facilities to administer and store vaccines and inability in making indigenous vaccines. Despite vaccination assistance from the US and Russia, these countries have not been successful in inoculating its populace, leading to rampant expiry of vaccines and medical resource wastage.

Furthermore, Latin American countries such as Mexico has blatantly expressed its reservations over US prioritizing Ukraine crisis over assisting Latin American countries to curb migration. The war has significantly hampered US's financial assistance to its neighbours due to the former's preoccupation with the war.

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Haiti: Five issues fueling gang violence

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On 8 October, 2022, Haiti asked for military assistance to curb its growing humanitarian crisis and insecurities. The request comes as the blockade of key fuel resources by the gangs that dominate Haiti is leading to a halt in the normalcy of Haitians.

Haiti is the first state to attain independence from its European colonizers in 1804. Since the early twentieth century, the state has been a saga of dictatorships, repressions, and widespread discontent among its people. It was only in the 1990s that elections, despite conspiracies, yielded legitimately elected presidents. Under these circumstances, fuelled by the constant attempts of the elected presidents to grab power and a devastating earthquake in 2010, the rise of gangs to exploit the situation gradually became the norm of the state. It was further exacerbated by every political faction instituting its own gang, which would inevitably break free from its political shackles to wreak havoc on the state. The constant struggle between the gangs and government of Haiti has pushed the Haitians into the mire of poverty, which has grown to be the inextricable driver of the intensification of gang violence in Haiti.

What are the factors that have contributed to the lengthy nature of the gang violence in Haiti? What would serve to eradicate these factors to improve the poverty prevalent in the state? The following paragraphs aim to answer these questions:

Haiti's crisis: Five issues

The crisis that simmered beneath the rippling surface of the social, political and economic environments of Haiti have burst forth with renewed vigour during the past year. This renewal has seen an intensification in the extent of violence and the consequent prevalence of crisis in Haiti. Several factors have contributed to the recent turn of the crisis in Haiti, which are interconnected in their effects, and are held together by the poverty of the state.

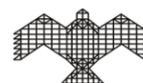
First, Moise's killing. After the assassination of late President Moise emerged a power vacuum that is yet to be filled, with Ariel Henry dualling as acting president and prime minister. It has given rise to discontent among Haitians, who witnessed several protests. The ever-present gangs of Haiti seized the presence of the power vacuum to make their presence known through criminal tactics.

Second, natural calamities. Haiti has played the unwilling host to several devastating natural disasters, key among them being the Covid-19 pandemic and the earthquake of 2021. These disasters deprive the youth of Haiti of critical resources required for sustenance and growth. The inability of the Haitian government to supplement these needs is complemented by the gangs of Haiti, initiating more youths into their networks to further their aims in the political arena.

Third, the role of the G9. The Group of nine gangs was created by Moise to curtail frequent protests against his detrimental rule in Haiti. The group sought to unite other gangs to focus the collective energy against the ruling members of Haiti. However, it was also involved in kidnapping and extortion of members who opposed its criminal activities, which created a vicious circle of poverty, inducing youths to join gangs, leading to more violence.

Fourth, prevalence of multiple insecurities. The poverty of Haiti has created insecurities in education, employment, political, economic and civil sustenance. Most importantly, the insecurity of basic necessities like food and medicines have been further exacerbated by the lack of proactive or reactive measures by the government, and the calculated reactions of the gang networks of Haiti, which seek to initiate a dual process of weeding out the opposition to and enlarging its ranks through violence and the timely provision of essential aid. The capturing of the key fuel reserves of strategic locations in Haiti is a method employed by g9 in its show of power.

Fifth, The Russia-Ukraine War. The war has disrupted supply chains of food and energy across the globe, forcing states to scramble for a solution to the impending calamity. Haiti, heavily dependent on the food, medical and miscellaneous supplies from the warring states, lacks adequate supply reserves of its own and has been hit hard with the Haitian government's customary lethargic reaction characterizing the hour. However, the poverty induced by this international crisis has given rise to the gangs of Haiti in its circle of timely aid and criminal violence across the state.



Looking ahead

It is evident that gang violence in Haiti is inextricably tied to the poverty that has prevailed for years. The vacuum of power engendered by the assassination of Moïse has served as an opportunity for the prominent gangs of Haiti to attempt to nullify that vacuum. The highly elusive Haitian presidential elections would serve the purpose of not only eliminating the power vacuum, but also seek to proactively eradicate poverty from Haiti.

While natural disasters are inevitable, effective conduct of state affairs could result in smooth delivery of aid and rescue assistance, and pave way for a smooth flow of supplies to the victims in need of them. This would erode the current role played by gangs as the heroes of the hour, thus eventually erasing their identities. Leading to a chain reaction of the G9 group, this would reduce its strategic options of displays of might of their collective muscle. While the transformation of current insecurities into securities in Haiti is an onerous task that requires the cooperative efforts of the government and the masses, it would gradually grow alongside the improvement of the living standards of Haitians.

Despite these possibilities, Haiti, like every state in the international arena, is subjected to the impact of the unforeseen changes like the Covid19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war. A measure of reserve of both supplies and stability must be aimed by the Haitian government to sustain consistently the possible positive changes that could be put into effect in the impoverished state. The key to such a possibility, however, would be a change or stabilization of the Haitian government, which would significantly revise the state of poverty in the state. Given the constant devolution of the circumstances in Haiti, particularly since the assassination of the late president Moïse, it stands to reason that the later the recuperation attempts are initiated, the more hurdles there would be to be overcome in a bid to stabilize and develop Haiti, free from the grips of gangs.

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Peace and Conflict in Human Wildlife Interactions

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Human wildlife conflict or HWC as it is popularly referred to, is increasingly, a ubiquitous part of human-wildlife interactions worldwide. HWC involves crop, livestock, house-raiding, property damage, physical attacks, killings, and oftentimes intrusion into human spaces, by wild animals. It comprises examples such as crop-raiding by elephants in Africa and Asia, agricultural and livestock damage by bears in Europe and North America, livestock raiding and threat to human safety by carnivores in Asia and Europe, property damage and cultivar depredation by primates in Asia and Africa and agricultural damage by birds in Asia, Europe, and North America. While crop and livestock depredation by wildlife animals has been a part of human-wildlife history, HWC in its current form has become a matter of concern not only because it has increased in scope and intensity over the last fifty-odd years, but also because it now involves a wide range of wildlife species and will, in all likelihood, involve many more, very soon. Animal species that were known to be shy and deep forest-dwellers are now

moving into the borderland areas that lie between forests and human settlements in search of anthropogenic food sources and has caused an influx of animal species into human-dominated spaces, such as suburban areas, rural regions, and urban settlements. As the consequences of wildlife depredations and physical attacks severely impact human livelihoods, cause financial distress, and create psychological stress and anxiety in people who come into frequent contact with wildlife species, HWC has begun to receive a lot of attention from ecologists, environmentalists, wildlife conservationists, forest officials, policymakers, and government leaders. Efforts to mitigate or resolve HWC events range from culling, trapping and translocating wildlife species to sterilizing animals, guarding property, farms, livestock and chasing away the offending species. Most measures have met with mixed success and there is no single technique that has worked for all the populations of a species or across all regions. There is growing

agitation amongst stakeholders about how to address this form of conflict.

HWC, as an example of environmental conflict, highlights three aspects of conflict for further consideration. The first concern is the naming of a conflict interaction. Although conflict mitigation measures have not been very successful for wildlife-driven HWC, it exemplifies that naming an interaction as conflict serves to draw attention to it and thereby begins initiatives to resolve it. While the HWC described above is now receiving attention as a conflict scenario, it must be noted that other forms of HWC also exist which are not characterized or portrayed as conflict in popular imagination. Human-driven HWC, in the form of poaching or hunting of wildlife, trade in wildlife parts and appropriation of wildlife habitats has always existed and has been a severe threat to the survival of animal populations. Yet, HWC events that primarily impact only animal populations have always been treated as a matter of wildlife conservation than as a matter of conflict. This not only underlines the deep bias humans hold with respect to other life forms and their right to the earth's resources, but also minimizes the attention paid to the issue and diminishes the efforts required to resolve this form of conflict.

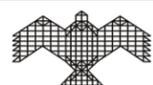
The second concern is the role of human beliefs and assumptions in driving the conflict, even when the conflict is ostensibly about environmental or resource issues. For example, studies on HWCs have established that people's perceptions of their economic losses due to wildlife depredations are often magnified and shaped by their cultural notions of the depredating species, than by actual damage. For example, the monkey is a religious icon in India and hence crop-raiding monkeys are rarely harmed, while depredating wild pigs are typically killed. Cheetahs rarely kill livestock, yet 7000 cheetahs were killed in Namibia in the 1980s in a bid to protect livestock. Other studies have also pointed out how many HWCs are essentially conflicts between human stakeholder groups and how to manage the competing needs of humans and wildlife for the same resources. Farmers in many regions in northern India believe that crop-raiding monkey populations have increased near their villages, because government officials translocate them from urban settlements, and the ensuing sense of resentment against the government has fueled many farmer protest movements in the region. Hyena depredations trigger inter-group conflicts between ethnic groups in Tanzania, as people believe that other communities train hyenas to kill their livestock.

Clearly then, human perceptions of risk can nurture conflict beyond the original causes of conflict.

The third aspect is the role of wildlife in perpetuating conflict. HWC was traditionally seen as arising from loss of wildlife habitat due to human encroachment into forest land. It was argued that reduction of forest cover leads to lowered food availability for animals, and contraction of their ranging area, due to which they move into farmlands and rural areas that border forests. More recently though, studies on animal behaviour advise that animals are not passive victims of anthropogenic changes to their habitat, instead, many animal species actively move towards human spaces to take advantage of the food resources and the shelter options these human-dominated zones offer. While navigating anthropogenic spaces entail high risks for animals, they also present abundant dividends in terms of rich food that allow individuals to reproduce more rapidly. Thus, HWC as viewed through the lens of animal behaviour emphasises a feedback mechanism that drives conflict and conserves it.

Against this background, it is useful to reflect on whether peace is possible in human-wildlife interactions. Humans typically view nonhuman species in utilitarian terms and such a perspective makes it difficult for them to appreciate the value that a species brings into their lives. Narratives of cooperation between humans and wild animals, such as coconut-picking monkeys, labouring elephants, and dolphins that aid fishers, are constructed from a human sense of exceptionalism and do not always involve voluntary action on the part of the animals. Peace is usually defined as a state of mutual harmony between groups in the absence of hostility and violence. While premeditated violence by animals towards humans does not exist, the same is not true for humans. There are active efforts to reduce such violence and it is possible that in the future we may achieve cessation of such violence in some regions the world at least, if not all. Mutual harmony however, is a more difficult objective for both parties to achieve, as we compete for the same goals. Perhaps then, it would be more pragmatic to strive for a world wherein we accept that animals fulfil necessary ecological roles in the ecosystem that we share with them and therefore it is in our selfish interests to coexist with them, with minimal hostility, to the greatest extent possible.

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Mapping Gender: Iran and its 'Burning' Hijabs

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The anti-hijab protests across the streets of the Islamic Republic of Iran have been making headlines for over a month now. The protests spread like wildfire on 16 September when a 22-year-old Kurdish woman, Mahsa Amini, succumbed to her injuries, allegedly caused due to custodial assault, for donning her hijab 'inappropriately.' The protesting women are burning their hijabs and chopping their hair off. The protests, claiming hundreds of lives so far in Iran, are against the country's morality police, who are infamous for their hideous religious impositions. While women's resistance against the notorious *hijab* laws has been thriving for over 40 years since the Islamic revolution of 1979, it is only now that it has gathered momentum due to the incessant media attention.

Hijab, in this regard, cannot simply be understood as an article of clothing. Mired in contentious political discourses associated with Islam, it has been a persistent source of political controversies. While *hijab* means 'segregation,' its symbolic values, associated with an idea of modesty as well as the identity, are of paramount importance. In short, despite being a form of bodily coverage, it creates a political spectacle around Muslim women and their identities. Such is also the case in Iran where at this point, anti-veiling sentiments are looming large against the Iranian government under the presidency of Ebrahim Raisi.

If we look at this conflict from a gendered perspective, we need to unfold two caveats surrounding it. Firstly, it is essential to understand the Iranian historical context behind the *hijab*. Secondly, the bearing of this context on women's rights in Iran as well as in different settings debating on women's choice and agency needs to be explored. An analysis of what it entails for the larger conceptual question on gender may be a worthy concluding point.

Understanding the Iranian Context

The genesis of political contention over the *hijab* in Iran dates back to 1936. The *Kashf-e hijab* (unveiling) edict of 1936 banned all forms of Iranian veiling practices. The Reza Shah regime's Western-influenced decree coerced women to either abandon the *hijab* or stay away from public view.

In the mid-1930s, despite the imposed measures, only four thousand Iranian women (mostly from

Tehran), hailing largely from the Western-educated upper class, foreigners and middle-class religious minorities, ventured into public domains unveiled (Abrahamian 2008: 84). This move, therefore alienated rural as well as middle and lower class women. The secularist high-handedness of the Shah regime was commented upon by one of the British diplomats: "There is nothing to take the place of religious influence, save an artificial nationalism which might well die with the Shah, leaving anarchy behind." (British Legation 1935; Cited in Abrahamian 2008: 95). While the next regime of Reza Pahlavi saw a dilution of the obligatory nature of the diktat, veiled women continued to be discriminated against and their upward social mobility was hindered significantly due to the prejudiced connotations attached to all forms of veils (El Guindi 1999: 174-175). This atmosphere of forced unveiling prevailed until the opposite diktats were issued under the new Islamic Republic of Iran post-1979 revolution. From forced unveiling to forced veiling, the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran walked from one extreme to another, this time reifying Islamic veiling vigorously.

The resistance against the Shah regime in the 1970s was built upon a redefined construction of women's modesty. Under the leadership of eminent sociologist Dr Ali Shariati, modesty was now being redefined emulating the spirit of the Prophet's daughter Fatima's legacy. A sartorial combination of *manteau* (a long jacket) and *rusari* (headscarf) brought back a functional sense of modesty, alongside the traditional Iranian *chadors* (cloaks). The veil was now assigned a resistive meaning as ripples of veiled women were seen on the streets opposing the Shah regime. Even the women who are not the regular wearers of the veil, came on the streets veiled in solidarity with those who chose to veil. But once the Revolution took place in 1979 and the Shah regime is toppled by a new regime established by Ayatollah Khomeini. In the 1980s, the Islamic Republic declared a diktat of forced veiling under the pretext of 'moral cleansing.' Article 638 of the Book Five (the only permanent part of the Penal Code) of Iran's Islamic Penal Code passed in 1996, reads as follows:

Anyone in public places and roads who openly commits a *harām* (sinful) act, in addition to the punishment provided for the act, shall be sentenced to two months' imprisonment or up to 74 lashes; and if they commit an act that is not

punishable but violates public prudency, they shall only be sentenced to ten days to two months' imprisonment or up to 74 lashes (Government of Islamic Republic of Iran 1996).

It will not be presumptuous to say that the measures of repression remained unchanged for both forced unveiling and veiling. Only the morality police (formally known as Guidance Patrol/*Ghast-e-Ershad*) of the Islamic regime soon took the place of the Shah regime's secret police (formally known as SAVAK). In short, the Iranian women's fate was taken from the fire to the frying pan in the hands of the repressive state regimes- no matter Westernised or Islamic. In short, the androcentric state regimes, irrespective of their so-called modern or religious tilt, decide to tell women what to wear and in turn, control their bodies.

Iran, Hijab and the Contemporary Times

Over the last five years, there have been several sporadic movements stemming from disenchanted people. The Iranian 'forced veiling' measures were also vehemently resisted, especially at the behest of the social media exfoliation post-2010. An Iranian Facebook page named *My Stealthy Freedom* featuring photographs of bare-headed women spearheaded the online White Wednesday movement where women posted online materials of them wearing anything white on Wednesdays to show their opposition to compulsory veiling in May 2017 (Persio 2017). The same year in December, expressing her solidarity with the movement Vida Movahed (31), *The Girl of Enghelab Street*, posted a video where she was shown removing her white headscarf and waving it while placing it on a stick for an hour on Tehran's Enghelab Street and was consequently arrested for her act, resulting in social media uproar worldwide (Gerretsen 2018).

Having said that, the amount of media attention that the *hijab* protests garnered in Iran at this point is unparalleled. It is both due to the contentious nature of the attire associated with Islam and the negative perception that the country's cleric authority receives for being at loggerheads with the West. As much as it feeds into a Western essentialisation of drawing an equivalence between embracing the *hijab* and backwardness, it fans the global discourses on Islamophobia. Overall, in Iran, no substantial regime change may be envisioned simply banking on these protests, precisely because the country's coercive measures are known to be notorious for quelling people's resistance. Yet, Iran and its women are the rays of hope inspiring generations of women fighting for their rights across the world.

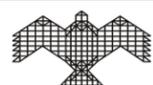
Impact on Women's Rights

The operative 'inappropriate', is known for dictating women's lives. Thus, talking of women's rights with the *hijab* as the bone of contention echoes different implications in different settings. For instance, its narrative pans out differently in a Muslim majority Islamic Republic of Iran or Saudi Arabia for that matter, compared to a Muslim minority France or India. Women's rights vis-à-vis bodily practices like the *hijab* are complex and multi-layered and therefore, seek to be understood from varied historical, and socio-political perspectives.

We may say that the *hijab* per se may not be having fixated negative implications, as the conventional media tends to suggest. Rather, the Iranian context runs parallel with the *hijab* controversy in France or in India. Pertaining to the *hijab*, these are comparable yet contrasting contexts. In France, the controversies may be traced back to 2004 when the country disallowed 'conspicuous religious symbols' in schools and in 2010, France country joined the European face-veil banning spree under the pretext of its secularism debate (Amer 2015). In India, the debate has been raging since the beginning of 2022 when educational institutions in Karnataka restricted *hijab*-clad Muslim students from attending educational institutions. While in Iran, women are oppressed because of forced *hijab*, in France and India, the idea of *hijab* is closely entangled with the idea of 'other.' In France, the 'other' is painted in the image of an immigrant Arab. In India, it is the image of a Muslim 'other' shown in the light of the country's communal history and minority politics. On the whole, irrespective of the locale or the issue, it is the repugnant peril of controlling women's bodies that remains at the heart of the rights discourse- it is indeed a basic right to live with dignity and self-respect. And an infringement of that forms the basic premise of patriarchy.

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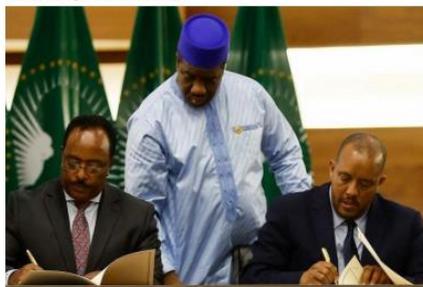
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Anu Maria Joseph and Madhura Mahesh



(Ethiopian government and Tigray leaders sign ceasefire agreement. Image Source: Phill Magakoe, AFP)

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The Supply Chain that fuels War Crimes in Myanmar



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Protests and Violence in Chad

Anu Maria Joseph



At least 50 people were killed in protests against extension of the transition period until 2024. (Image Source: Blaise Daroustone/DW)



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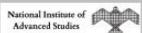
Haiti's Gang Violence, Venezuelan Migrants and the US, and Global Hunger Index

Madhura Mahesh, Sejal Sharma and Sandeep Ganesh



(Haitians fleeing for their lives amidst a crackdown on gangs. Image Source: The Hindu/Reuters)

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UNHRC proceedings on Xinjiang and the Oxfam report on reducing inequality

Avishka Ashok and Madhura Mahesh



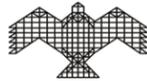
(The 51st session of the UNHRC rejected the draft resolution on holding a debate on the human rights situation in China's Xinjiang Autonomous Region. Image Source: VCG/Global Times)

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About Conflict Weekly

The Conflict Weekly an academic endeavour to bring every Wednesday/Thursday a weekly analysis of the conflict and peace processes in the world; aiming to look at the larger peace picture. It is published by the NIAS-IPRI in collaboration with the KAS India Office.



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